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Students' Speaking Proficiency Using Picture Series: A Descriptive Quantitative Study

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ABTRACT
This study aims to describe the speaking proficiency level of students using the picture series. This study uses a quantitative descriptive research design. The population in this study are Ummi Maryam's students of Sunan Drajat Islamic Boarding School, with a sample of 10 university-level students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through a speaking test based on a series of pictures titled "The Monkey and The Crocodile." Student performance was assessed using Brown's speaking assessment rubric having scale score 1-5, including five aspects: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The results of the study show that the students' average score is 72.8%, placing their speaking proficiency in the average category. Specifically, 3 students (30%) fall into the good category, 5 students (50%) into the average category, and 2 students (20%) into the poor category. The findings revealed that picture series is effective in stimulating fluency and comprehension (highest score 40), helping students maintain logical flow without significant pauses. However, grammar remains the weakest aspect (lowest score 31), marked by inconsistent use of tenses. The low standard deviation value (7.00) indicates that speaking ability among students tends to be homogeneous, which suggests that picture series provides a stable and consistent influence in helping students organize their thoughts. This study concludes that although picture series is a powerful tool for improving confidence and speaking fluency, further emphasis on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary variation is needed to achieve a higher level of proficiency.

Keywords: speaking proficiency, picture series, EFL students, descriptive quantitative

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INTRODUCTION

English has become a crucial universal communication tool in this globalization era. Wardrough (2006:1) stated that language is what society talks about. From this statement, it can be said that everyone needs to express or convey something to others because they are social beings who constantly interact in community life. Regarding language, English, which is an international language, plays an important role and is studied in almost every country. This is done to produce a younger generation that can compete in today's global world. Baker (2001) stated that there are four basic language skills, namely speaking, reading, listening, and writing. According to Leong & Ahmadi in Yulistrinisya, et al. (2018:157), speaking is the most important skill in effective communication. It is caused that speaking is the main tool for social interaction. In daily communication, humans interact more often verbally.

Speaking is one of the productive skills in English which allows individuals to convey ideas, feelings, and information directly. However, in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), many students face difficulties in expressing their ideas orally. Common problems that often arise including low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and difficulty in forming sentences spontaneously.

In the school environment, the learning process often feels monotonous, where students receive little visual stimulation that can trigger their desire to tell stories. It's happened too to the Ummi Maryam's students of Sunan Drajat Female Islamic Boarding School that have difficulty to develop their ideas in speaking because of low vocabulary mastery, lack of the ideas or stimulus that cause them getting confused to construct the meaningful sentences. To address this challenge, the use of innovative learning media is highly needed. One of the media considered effective is Picture Series. This media provides a logical visual series that can help functionaries organize their thought processes before expressing them. Through sequential images, functionaries not only see objects but also understand the context of events, which can stimulate their descriptive and narrative abilities.

Although this media has been widely used, it is very important to measure objectively the extent to which this media truly reflects students' speaking proficiency. Therefore, in this study, the researcher wants to know what the level of students' speaking proficiency using Picture Series is. This study was conducted to quantitatively capture the level of students' speaking proficiency through picture-cued storytelling tasks.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Speaking is a type of oral communication involving the speaker who delivers the message and the listener who receives the message. According to Nunan (1991), speaking is one of the fundamental language skills, it is considered as the important of learning English as foreign language. Richards (2020) in Nazalatus, et.al (2024) stated that speaking skill plays a crucial role in enabling students to interact effectively and express their thoughts in their target languages. Based on these theories, it can be concluded that speaking is the most important language skill that has the crucial role in communication. As cited in Hainun, Hasanuddin & Rahman (2021), Burns and Joyce (1997) elaborated that speaking is a process of interaction in a situation to construct meaning which involve processing, producing, and receiving information. Furthermore, Darmuki &Hariyadi (2019) as cited in Wahyudi, Hanum & Ali (2021) explained that speaking skill is one of the productive and expressive language skills used to communicate directly or face to face with other parties for certain purposes. From these explanations of speaking's definition, it can be concluded that speaking is an interactive process in constructing meaning that involves the production, reception, and processing of information.

Teaching speaking in the EFL context is not easy & has challenges. In the context of education, speaking proficiency is not merely the ability to produce words, but the ability to communicate effectively while considering linguistic aspects. As stated by Nation & Newton (2021), the main challenges students face in developing speaking skills include low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and linguistic barriers, such as difficulty in pronunciation and lack of adequate vocabulary. Because of those, they get difficulty in expressing their ideas orally. So, the innovative strategy or technique is needed as a prompt that makes it easier for students to develop their ideas in speaking skills. And one of the techniques that can be applied in teaching speaking is picture-cued storytelling that means in teaching speaking, the usage of picture series as the media is the best choice to help students in speaking skill.

Picture Series is a series of interconnected images that form a storyline. This medium falls into the category of visual media, which functions to stimulate imagination and help students organize ideas. According to Mary Finnochioaro (1973) as cited in Hardianti, Dollah & Sakkir (2023), picture series is defined as a series of pictures, which are placed on one chart. Muna (2016) as cited in Haryanto & Melinda (2022) stated that by the usage of picture series, the eye of the students may be focused on the photo, so the picture creates their inspiration. Furthermore, Aprilia & Andreani (2020) stated that picture series as the media can be used as the students' guidance in developing their speaking skill. Based on the description of picture series, it can be concluded that picture series are used as a stimulus to trigger students' storytelling abilities. This media serves as a bridge between what students see and how they formulate it into spoken language. Using this media allows researchers to observe students' speaking proficiency in a more structured way because all students respond to the same visual stimulus.

According to Brown (2004), there are some scoring categories of speaking proficiency including grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation which each of the aspect have scale score 1-5. The researcher tries to describe the speaking proficiency categories through picture series by referring to Browns' rubric of oral proficiency scoring categories.

Table 1. Speaking Proficiency Scoring Categories

Grammar		
1	→	Grammar is so poor that sentences are almost completely incomprehensible.
2	→	Severe and frequent grammatical errors, making it hard for the listener to understand the intended meaning.
3	→	Frequently makes mistakes with complex structures, but basic patterns (such as Simple Present or Past Tense in picture sequences) are correct.

Grammar		
4	→	Mistakes occur occasionally but never interfere with meaning. Control of language structures is good.
5	→	Grammatical errors are very rare. The use of complex sentence structures is very accurate.
Vocabulary		
1	→	Vocabulary is insufficient to describe even the simplest content of the image
2	→	Vocabulary is very limited; students often choose the wrong words, making the image description inaccurate.
3	→	Uses common vocabulary sufficient to describe images, but often limited or not very varied.
4	→	Vocabulary is more than adequate to explain a series of images; word choice errors are rare
5	→	Vocabulary usage is very accurate, varied, and able to describe the details of the image with rich nuances.
Comprehension		
1	→	Does not understand at all what needs to be done or what is in the image
2	→	Has difficulty understanding the context of the image; only grasps small pieces of the instructions
3	→	Understands the main idea of the image, but sometimes needs additional explanation or repetition of instructions
4	→	Understands almost the entire context of the story in the image at a normal pace.
5	→	Understands all instructions and the context of the image very well without any doubt.
Fluency		
1	→	Speech is extremely fragmented, making communication ineffective.
2	→	Speaks very slowly, often stops for long periods, and repeats words frequently due to language difficulties
3	→	Fluency is interrupted by efforts to find words; speech feels somewhat halting but continues.
4	→	Speaks fluently with slight hesitation; able to maintain the flow of speech consistently.
5	→	Speaks very fluently and naturally. Pauses only occur to think about the storyline from the pictures.
Pronunciation		
1	→	Pronunciation problems are so severe that the words spoken are unrecognizable.
2	→	Many pronunciation errors often cause misunderstandings or ambiguity in meaning
3	→	There are pronunciation issues that sometimes require the listener to concentrate fully
4	→	Pronunciation is clear; accent may be noticeable but never hinders the listener's understanding
5	→	Pronunciation is very clear; intonation and word stress are perfect, easy to understand like a native speaker.

From the rubric on the table above, the assessment of speaking proficiency is not only focus on the accuracy of rules (grammar & pronunciation), but also on the comfort in communication (fluency), the mastery of the material (vocabulary), and the ability of understanding the picture context (comprehension). The goal of the assessment itself is to measure to what the student is able to convey a message through the picture series accurately, fluently, and appropriately.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative descriptive research design. According to Creswell (2012), descriptive research aims to systematically and accurately describe the phenomena or characteristics of a population. According to Wiwik (2022) in Wulandari et.al (2023), quantitative descriptive research is research aimed at describing something being studied based on real facts by drawing conclusions from

observed phenomena using statistical numbers. In this study, the researcher describes the speaking proficiency level of students when using the Picture Series media.

This study was held in the female dormitory of Ummi Maryam in the Sunan Drajat Islamic Boarding School. This population of this study were students of Ummi Maryam dormitory, while the sample of this study was student who was in the level of college following the upgrading class of English, and the sample consisted of 10 students. The sampling technique used purposive sampling. It was taken to adjust of this study needed and to obtain a sample that is truly representative and rich in information according to the specific criteria needed to address the research problem.

The instrument of this study was speaking test through storytelling tasks based on picture series given. To assess the students' performance, the researcher used the speaking performance rubric from Brown including 5 aspects: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation which each of the aspect have scale score 1-5.

The data collecting technique in this study used some steps, including:

(1) Preparation: the researcher prepares the media of Picture Series about Monkey and Crocodile
(2) Implementation: the researcher gives the students 5 minutes to learn the arrangement of picture series
(3) Performance: the students are given around 15 minutes to tell the picture series orally in English.
(4) Recording: all of the students' performance are recorded and changed into transcript and assessed by the researcher

The technique of analysis data of this study is analysed descriptive quantitative by scoring (scale 1-5), and tabulating with the formula below:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\textit{The Gain Score}}{\textit{The Maximal Score}} \text{ x } 100$$

After scoring, the researcher classifies the score into level of students' speaking ability. The table is below:

Table 2. The Classification of Speaking Score

No	Percentage	Categories
1.	90-100%	Excellent
2.	80-89%	Good
3.	65-79%	Average
4.	55-64%	Poor
5.	0-54%	Very Poor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the researcher presents the data findings obtained from the assessment of the speaking proficiency of 10 Ummi Maryam's functionaries through Picture Series. The data presented includes individual scores, descriptive statistics for each assessment aspect (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) with the scale 1-5, and the categorization of respondents' speaking ability levels. Furthermore, these findings are analyzed more deeply in the discussion section to provide an objective description of Picture Series in English speaking ability. The table of students' speaking proficiency is in the following:

Table 3. The Speaking Proficiency of Ummi Maryam's Students

No	Students	Speaking Assessment					Total	Percentage (%)	Categorization
		P	G	V	F	C			
1.	Tisa	4	3	4	5	4	20	80	Good
2.	Sari	4	3	3	5	4	29	76	Average
3.	Arum	3	3	4	4	4	18	72	Average
4.	Icha	4	3	3	3	4	17	68	Average
5.	Hajar	4	3	3	3	4	17	68	Average
6.	Isna	3	3	3	3	4	16	64	Poor
7.	Putri	3	3	3	3	4	16	64	Poor
8.	Rika	4	3	4	5	4	20	80	Good

No	Students	Speaking Assessment					Total	Percentage (%)	Categorization
		P	G	V	F	C			
9.	Eva	3	3	4	4	4	18	72	Average
10.	Leni	4	4	4	5	4	21	84	Good
Total		**36**	**31**	**35**	**40**	**40**	**182**	**72.8**	**Average**
Note : Pronunciation "P", Grammar "G", Vocabulary "V", Fluency "F", and Comprehension "C"									

From the data above, the average student score is 72.8%, which classifies the students' speaking proficiency in the average category. Specifically, 3 students (30%) fall into the good category, 5 students (50%) into the average category, and 2 students (20%) into the poor category.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speaking Score	10	64.00	84.00	72.8000	7.00476

Based on the table 4 above, it is known Mean score of students' speaking proficiency after using the Picture Series is 72.80, which means that the overall speaking ability of the students falls into the Average category. Meanwhile the Standard Deviation (SD) value is 7.00 that indicates the level of variation in abilities among students. On a scale of 0-100, the number 7.00 falls into the low category (SD < 10). It means that the speaking ability of students tends to be homogeneous, and Picture Series has a stable influence in helping almost all students.

According to the speaking proficiency scoring categories, there are some points found in the data analysis, including:

(1) Pronunciation

This aspect measures the clarity of word pronunciation, intonation, and syllable stress so that the message can be understood. Based on the data analysis, the total score of pronunciation was 36 which was gotten by six students with the scale score of 4, which means that most of the students have fairly clear and stable pronunciation, making the story easy to follow. However, for students like Putri who received a score of 3, there may be an influence of their mother tongue accent or mispronunciation of certain words, such as the phrase *"monkey's heart"*, which somewhat hinders the listener's understanding.

(2) Grammar

This aspect assesses the use of sentence structure, the use of tenses, and grammatical accuracy. The grammar aspect received the lowest score among the other aspects, with a total score of 31. This is caused by frequent mixing of tenses, where Past Tense should be used for narratives, but students often use Present Tense. For the example, sentence of Tisa *"one day the crocodile feels hungry"*. The word *"feel"* is incorrect or present tense form which it should be the past tense form *"felt"*. Furthermore, the sentence of Arum *"after that monkey gives the crocodile some apples"* which the correct word is *"gave"* or the past tense form not *"gives"* or the present tense form.

(3) Vocabulary

This aspect assesses the richness of word choice and the accuracy of word usage within the context of the story. The total score for vocabulary is 35. This score is at an intermediate level. Students are able to use key words such as *hungry, land, heart, clever, realized*. Some students show good word variation, such as 5 students who received a score of 4. However, there are errors in word selection, for example the word *"hearth"* used by Icha, which should have been the correct word *"heart"*. Furthermore, there is a limitation in specific vocabulary, for example the words *"after that, then"* which are often used by the students, whereas other words could also be used, such as *"next, afterward, soon, suddenly, meanwhile, later"*.

(4) Fluency

This aspect measures speech fluency, a reasonable speed, and the absence of distracting pauses, such as *"um.., ah..."*. Along with the aspect of comprehension, these two aspects have the highest total

score of 40 ad this is the highest score. This proves that the Picture Series is very effective in keeping students talking continuously without many stops. There are 4 students who received a perfect score of 5, which means that they did not seem to have difficulty thinking about "what to say next".

(5) Comprehension

This aspect assesses the extent to which students understand the content of the story and are able to convey a logical message to the listeners. The score is even because all students received a score of 4. This shows that all students fully understand the storyline of *The Monkey and The Crocodile*. Although their grammar is not correct, the story's message is still conveyed properly. The listeners still know that the crocodile wants to eat the monkey's heart and the monkey manages to trick it. The picture series ensures that no student goes off the topic.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of quantitative descriptive data analysis, this study concludes that the use of picture series plays a significant role in mapping and stimulating the speaking abilities of the Ummi Maryam's student. The main findings of this study are summarized as follows:

First, the overall speaking proficiency of the students is in the average category with an average score of 72.8%. The score distribution shows that 30% of students reached the good category, 50% the average category, and 20% the poor category. With a low standard deviation value (7.00), the picture series media proves to provide a stable and homogeneous influence, helping almost all students overcome the 'idea confusion' barrier previously mentioned in the research background.

Secondly, picture series are very effective in addressing the problem of low idea stimulation. This is evidenced by the fluency and comprehension aspects, which scored the highest (total 40). Sequential visual media function as an effective cognitive aid for students in organizing their train of thought, allowing them to speak continuously without significant pauses and to remain within the appropriate story context.

Third, although this medium successfully improves fluency, technical language aspects remain a challenge. Grammar is the weakest aspect with the lowest score (31), marked by inconsistency in the use of the past tense in narratives. Similarly, in the vocabulary aspect, students are able to convey the main message but still have limitations in word choice variety and accuracy.

Overall, this study confirms that Picture Series is an effective innovative solution to stimulate students' productive abilities in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) environment, particularly in islamic boarding school settings. The picture series successfully addresses the challenge of low visual stimulation, which causes boredom in learning. However, to achieve the Excellent category, the integration of visual media with reinforcement of grammatical structures and vocabulary enhancement is highly recommended in future teaching practices.

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