

Improving Students' Speaking Skills through Pictures at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas

Prameswari George Rompas^{1*} , Tini Mogea² , Paula L. Hampp³ 

¹⁻³ English Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Manado, Tondano 95618, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 08 July 2026	This study investigated the effectiveness of pictures as instructional media in improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas. The study employed a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental design. The participants were 20 seventh-grade students selected through total sampling. Data were collected using speaking performance tests administered before and after the treatment. Students' speaking performance was assessed in terms of fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure using a scoring rubric. The treatment involved picture-based speaking activities in which students observed, described, and interpreted visual materials to generate ideas and produce spoken language. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired samples t-test with SPSS version 21. The findings showed a substantial improvement in students' speaking performance. The mean score increased from 55.75 in the pretest to 83.25 in the posttest, representing a mean gain of 27.50 points. The standard deviation also decreased from 7.83 to 4.94, indicating more consistent performance after the treatment. The paired samples t-test produced a t-value of 17.626 with 19 degrees of freedom and a significance value of $p < 0.001$, confirming a statistically significant improvement. The findings suggest that pictures provided concrete visual contexts that helped students generate ideas, develop vocabulary, organize sentences, improve fluency and pronunciation, and participate more confidently in speaking activities. Therefore, pictures can serve as an accessible and effective medium for developing speaking skills among junior high school EFL learners in classroom contexts.
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1. Introduction

Speaking is a fundamental component of second or foreign language learning because it enables learners to communicate meanings, ideas, opinions, and feelings in real-life contexts. Speaking proficiency is an important indicator of communicative competence because effective oral communication requires the integration of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactional resources (Ghane & Razmi, 2023; Tsang, 2023). In EFL contexts, where opportunities to use English outside the classroom are often limited, classroom speaking activities become essential for developing meaningful oral communication. Moreover, speaking development is influenced not only by linguistic knowledge but also by learners' emotions, motivation, and exposure to spoken English (Tsang & Lee, 2023).

Despite its importance, speaking remains challenging for many EFL learners. Limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and insufficient opportunities for oral practice can hinder students' speaking performance (Marlia et al., 2023; Rahmadani et al., 2024). Among Indonesian EFL learners, speaking anxiety has been associated with psychological, linguistic, and classroom-related factors, including nervousness, limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes (Abrar et al., 2022; Arumsari & Molla, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for supportive teaching practices that provide meaningful opportunities for students to speak. Teachers therefore need to design engaging activities and provide appropriate instructional support, particularly for learners who have limited confidence and opportunities to use English (System, 2023; Purwati et al., 2023).

One instructional medium that may address these challenges is the use of pictures. Pictures provide concrete visual information that can help learners generate ideas, organize thoughts, and construct spoken messages. They can be used to support activities such as describing objects, people, places, and events, as well as storytelling and retelling. Previous studies have demonstrated that picture-based activities can improve speaking performance, particularly when learners use sequential visual information to construct and retell stories (Haryanto & Melinda, 2022; Noor et al., 2023). Picture series are particularly useful because they present connected visual events that can help learners establish relationships between events, organize information chronologically, and produce connected speech (Nur et al., 2021; Ramadhani & Syahputra, 2022).

In addition to supporting idea generation, pictures may contribute to learners' confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate. Visual prompts reduce students' dependence on their existing linguistic resources by providing concrete content that can be transformed into vocabulary, phrases, and sentences. Purnama et al. (2022) found that students responded positively to picture-strip stories, particularly in terms of confidence, motivation, language development, and willingness to participate in speaking activities. This is particularly relevant for junior high school learners, whose speaking development may be affected by anxiety, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and other psychological factors (Rahmadani et al., 2024). Picture-supported instruction may therefore provide a less threatening environment in which students can focus on communicating meaning.

Empirical evidence also supports the effectiveness of pictures in speaking instruction. Putri (2023) found that picture-supported instruction helped students overcome difficulties related to pronunciation, grammar, and confidence, while Noor et al. (2023) reported improvements in speaking proficiency through picture-series storytelling and retelling activities. Pictures can also be integrated into communicative activities, including pair work, group discussion, storytelling, retelling, questioning, and information-gap tasks. Such activities provide opportunities for learners to use English for meaningful purposes, consistent with task-based approaches that emphasize language use to accomplish communicative tasks (Huynh & Nguyen, 2023). Furthermore, speaking performance should

be assessed multidimensionally because oral proficiency involves several components, including fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and complexity (Ghane & Razmi, 2023).

Although previous studies have demonstrated the potential of pictures and picture series to improve speaking skills, further context-specific research is needed, particularly at the junior high school level. The effectiveness of visual media may vary according to learners' age, proficiency, classroom conditions, and learning objectives. Pictures are also a practical and accessible medium because they can be implemented through printed images, photographs, textbook illustrations, picture cards, or picture series without requiring sophisticated technological facilities. Their accessibility makes them particularly relevant to EFL contexts where opportunities for authentic English communication are limited (Haryanto & Melinda, 2022; Purnama et al., 2022).

Based on these considerations, the present study investigates whether the use of pictures can improve the English-speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas. The study focuses on four aspects of speaking performance: fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. By examining changes in these aspects before and after picture-based instruction, this study aims to provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of pictures as an instructional medium for junior high school EFL learners. The findings are expected to contribute to English language teaching practice by providing teachers with a simple, flexible, and engaging medium that can help students generate ideas, develop vocabulary, organize spoken messages, and participate more confidently in classroom communication.

2. Theoretical Framework

Several recent studies have examined the use of pictures and picture series in English language teaching, particularly for developing students' speaking skills. Haryanto and Melinda (2022) investigated the use of picture series for retelling stories and reported that visual sequences could support students in organizing ideas and producing spoken language. Their findings indicate that picture series can provide students with a concrete stimulus for developing narratives while practicing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency (Haryanto & Melinda, 2022). Similarly, Lestari and Sholichah (2022) found that the implementation of picture series contributed to improvements in students' speaking ability by providing visual support during speaking activities.

More recent evidence has further strengthened the effectiveness of picture-based instruction. Noor et al. (2023) investigated the efficacy of picture series based on popular Indonesian fairy tales in improving students' English-speaking proficiency and found positive changes in students' speaking performance after the treatment. The study demonstrates that sequential visual information can assist learners in developing spoken narratives and communicating ideas more effectively (Noor et al., 2023). Sari et al. (2023) also examined the effectiveness of picture series in teaching speaking and found a significant improvement in students' speaking performance following picture-series instruction.

More recent research has continued to demonstrate the potential of picture-series techniques for speaking development. Hildaini and Husairi (2025) reported that picture-series activities improved junior high school students' speaking performance, particularly in fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and confidence. The study also indicated increased student participation and motivation during classroom activities. In addition, Imelia and Suryanto (2026) examined interactive digital storytelling through picture series and reported positive effects on students' speaking skills, particularly in a junior high school EFL context.

The similarity between these previous studies and the present research lies in their use of visual materials to stimulate students' oral production and facilitate participation in English-

speaking activities. However, differences can be identified in terms of educational context, instructional procedures, and participants. Some previous studies focused on storytelling, fairy tales, digital storytelling, or broader speaking instruction, whereas the present study specifically investigates the effectiveness of pictures in improving the speaking ability of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas. Therefore, this study seeks to provide further empirical evidence concerning the application of pictures as a speaking medium in a specific junior high school EFL context.

2.1 Pictures as Teaching Media

Pictures are visual learning resources that can provide learners with contextual information and stimulate the production of language. In English language teaching, pictures can be used to introduce vocabulary, generate ideas, describe objects or situations, construct narratives, and stimulate interaction among learners. Recent research on picture-series instruction indicates that visual sequences can provide learners with a structured basis for organizing information before and during speaking activities (Haryanto & Melinda, 2022; Noor et al., 2023).

One important advantage of pictures is that they provide learners with a concrete reference when they are required to speak. Students who have difficulty deciding what to say can use the visual information in a picture as a starting point for constructing words, phrases, and sentences. Picture series can provide even greater support because several images establish a logical sequence of events. Consequently, learners can connect individual visual elements and transform them into a coherent spoken message. The findings of recent studies demonstrate that this type of visual scaffolding can contribute to improvements in students' speaking performance (Sari et al., 2023; Hildaini & Husairi, 2025).

Pictures can also support students' affective engagement in speaking activities. Speaking in a foreign language may cause anxiety, particularly when learners are uncertain about vocabulary, pronunciation, or sentence construction. Recent research has shown that emotions, motivation, and opportunities for oral language use are associated with learners' speaking proficiency (Tsang & Lee, 2023). In particular, enjoyment and speaking motivation have been found to play important roles in young learners' speaking development. Thus, visual media such as pictures may help create more accessible and engaging speaking tasks by giving students ideas and reducing the difficulty of generating content independently.

2.2 Speaking Ability

Speaking ability refers to learners' capacity to communicate meaning through oral language. In contemporary foreign-language education, speaking proficiency is an important component of communicative competence because it reflects learners' ability to use English to convey meaning and interact with others. Tsang and Lee (2023) describe speaking proficiency as an important aspect of communicative competence and demonstrate that speaking development is associated with learners' motivation, emotions, and exposure to spoken English.

Speaking is not simply the production of grammatically correct sentences. Effective speaking involves the ability to organize ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, produce comprehensible pronunciation, maintain an appropriate degree of fluency, and communicate meaning according to the situation. Therefore, speaking instruction needs to provide learners with opportunities to produce language in meaningful contexts rather than relying exclusively on memorization or written exercises.

Picture-based activities can facilitate this process because students are given meaningful visual contexts from which they can develop spoken messages. For example, students can describe people, objects, places, activities, or events represented in pictures. When pictures are presented sequentially, students can also construct narratives by connecting one event to

another. Previous empirical studies confirm that picture-series activities can improve students' speaking performance and provide opportunities for students to practice oral language in meaningful contexts (Haryanto & Melinda, 2022; Noor et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2023).

2.3 Components of Speaking Ability

Speaking ability is multidimensional and can be evaluated through several aspects of oral performance. In the present study, the major components considered are fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. These components are appropriate because they represent both the linguistic resources and the performance characteristics required for effective oral communication.

Fluency refers to the ability to produce spoken language continuously and naturally without excessive hesitation or interruption. Fluency is important because learners need to maintain the flow of communication while expressing their ideas. Recent research has demonstrated that speaking proficiency is related not only to learners' linguistic knowledge but also to their motivation, emotional experiences, and opportunities to use spoken English (Tsang & Lee, 2023). Picture-series activities can support fluency because the sequence of images provides students with a continuous source of ideas, allowing them to move from one event or image to another instead of having to generate a topic without contextual support.

Vocabulary is another essential component of speaking because learners need an adequate range of words to express their intended meanings. Limited vocabulary may prevent students from explaining ideas even when they understand the topic. Pictures can provide contextualized vocabulary learning because students can associate words with visible objects, actions, people, and situations. Picture-series activities can subsequently encourage learners to use the vocabulary in connected speech rather than learning individual words in isolation (Noor et al., 2023; Hildaini & Husairi, 2025).

Pronunciation concerns the intelligibility and comprehensibility of learners' spoken production. Appropriate pronunciation enables listeners to understand the intended message and is therefore an important component of successful oral communication. Picture-based activities provide opportunities for repeated oral production because students can describe the same visual information individually, in pairs, or in groups. Recent studies using picture series have included pronunciation as one of the important dimensions of speaking performance and have reported improvements following picture-based instruction (Hildaini & Husairi, 2025).

Sentence structure refers to learners' ability to organize words into grammatically meaningful utterances. Although speaking instruction should prioritize communication, learners still need to construct comprehensible sentences to convey their intended meanings accurately. Picture prompts can help learners produce sentences because the visual context provides information about the subject, action, object, place, and sequence of events. Through repeated description and storytelling, students can practice constructing increasingly organized spoken sentences.

2.4 Fluency in Speaking

Fluency is a central dimension of speaking proficiency because it concerns how effectively learners maintain the flow of oral communication. A fluent speaker is generally able to express ideas with relatively continuous speech while managing pauses, hesitations, and reformulations. Fluency should therefore be understood not simply as speaking rapidly but as maintaining an appropriate flow of speech while successfully communicating meaning.

Recent research supports the importance of fluency within broader speaking proficiency. Tsang and Lee (2023) found that young EFL learners' speaking proficiency was associated with speaking motivation, emotional experiences, and spoken input. Their findings suggest

that speaking performance is influenced by more than linguistic knowledge alone. Picture-based instruction may contribute to fluency by reducing the cognitive demands involved in generating ideas. When students have a picture or picture sequence as a visual prompt, they can concentrate more on how to express the information rather than deciding what content to produce.

Picture-series activities are particularly relevant to fluency because the images provide continuity. Students can use one picture as the starting point and then continue their speech by referring to subsequent images. This structure may reduce long pauses and help students maintain the sequence of their ideas. Empirical research has shown that picture-series instruction can improve speaking performance, including fluency, while simultaneously increasing students' participation and confidence (Hildaini & Husairi, 2025; Sari et al., 2023).

2.5 Theoretical Position of the Present Study

Based on the theoretical and empirical discussion above, pictures can be conceptualized as visual instructional media that provide contextual and cognitive support for students' oral language production. Pictures give students concrete information from which they can generate ideas, select vocabulary, construct sentences, practice pronunciation, and develop more continuous speech. Picture series provide additional sequencing support because students can organize their speech according to the relationship between successive images. The present study therefore assumes that the use of pictures can facilitate students' speaking development by providing visual stimuli and meaningful contexts for oral production. The effectiveness of the medium will be examined through students' speaking performance, particularly in terms of fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. This framework provides the basis for investigating whether the implementation of pictures can significantly improve the speaking ability of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas.

3. Method

This research employed a quantitative approach using a one-group pretest-posttest design, which is categorized as a pre-experimental research design. The design involved a single group of participants who were assessed before and after the treatment without the inclusion of a control group. The population comprised all seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas in the 2024/2025 academic year, consisting of 20 students. Given the relatively small population size, the researcher employed a total sampling technique, in which all 20 students were included as research participants.

The instrument used to collect the data was a speaking performance test designed to measure students' speaking ability before and after the treatment. During the pretest, each student was asked to select one picture from several pictures provided by the researcher and orally describe its content in front of the class for approximately one minute. Following the treatment, the posttest was administered using a similar speaking task, in which each student was randomly assigned a picture and asked to describe or explain its content orally for approximately two minutes. Students' speaking performance in both tests was evaluated based on four components: fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. A scoring rubric was employed to assess each component on a scale from 1 to 4, with the scores subsequently converted to a maximum overall score of 100. The use of the same assessment criteria for both testing sessions was intended to maintain consistency and fairness in evaluating students' speaking performance.

The data collection procedure consisted of three main stages: pretest, treatment, and posttest. At the beginning of the study, the pretest was administered to identify the students' initial speaking ability. The students then received treatment through picture-based speaking activities. During the treatment, the researcher used pictures as visual instructional media and guided the students to observe, describe, and interpret various visual stimuli through

structured speaking activities. These activities were intended to provide students with concrete contexts for generating ideas and practicing oral language. After the treatment was completed, the students took the posttest using the predetermined speaking task to measure changes in their speaking performance.

The data obtained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate the mean scores and standard deviations of students' speaking performance in both testing sessions. In addition, a paired samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the difference between the pretest and posttest scores was statistically significant. The test was conducted at an alpha significance level of 0.05. A significance value (p) below 0.05 was interpreted as evidence of a statistically significant difference between students' speaking performance before and after the implementation of picture-based instruction.

4. Results and Discussion

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design to investigate the effectiveness of pictures as instructional media in improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas. The students' speaking performance was assessed based on four components, namely fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. The data obtained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS version 21. The analysis focused on comparing the students' mean scores before and after the treatment, examining the relationship between the pretest and posttest scores, and testing whether the observed improvement was statistically significant.

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	55.75	20	7.83	1.75
Posttest	83.25	20	4.94	1.10

The descriptive analysis revealed a considerable improvement in students' speaking performance following the implementation of picture-based instruction. As presented in Table 1, the mean pretest score was 55.75 (SD = 7.83), indicating that the students' initial speaking ability was relatively low before the treatment. After receiving instruction through picture-based activities, the mean posttest score increased substantially to 83.25 (SD = 4.94). Thus, the students demonstrated a mean gain of 27.50 points from the pretest to the posttest. In addition to the increase in the mean score, the reduction in the standard deviation from 7.83 to 4.94 suggests that students' speaking performances became more consistent after the treatment. These findings indicate that the use of pictures was associated with substantial improvement in students' overall speaking performance.

Table 2. Paired Samples Correlation

N	Correlation (r)	Sig. (p)
20	0.48	0.0312

The paired samples correlation analysis further indicated a moderate positive relationship between students' pretest and posttest scores. As shown in Table 2, the correlation coefficient was $r = 0.48$, with a significance value of $p = 0.0312$ ($p < 0.05$). This result indicates that students' performance before and after the treatment was moderately related. Although the correlation does not itself establish the effectiveness of the treatment, it suggests

that students' relative performance was not completely independent across the two measurement occasions. The subsequent paired samples t-test was therefore used to determine whether the difference between the two sets of scores was statistically significant.

Table 3. Paired Samples Test

Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	T-Value	df	Sig. (p)
27.50	6.97	17.626	19	< 0.001

The results of the paired samples t-test presented in Table 3 confirmed a statistically significant difference between the students' pretest and posttest speaking scores. The mean difference was 27.50 points, with a standard deviation of 6.97. The obtained t-value was 17.626 with 19 degrees of freedom, and the significance level was $p < 0.001$. Because the significance value was lower than the predetermined alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0), which stated that there was no significant difference between students' speaking performance before and after the treatment, was rejected. Conversely, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. The statistical evidence therefore demonstrates that the students' speaking skills improved significantly following the implementation of picture-based instruction.

The improvement in speaking performance can also be understood from the instructional functions of pictures during the learning process. Pictures provided students with concrete visual contexts that could serve as prompts for speaking. Rather than having to generate ideas entirely from their own imagination, students could rely on visible objects, people, actions, and situations represented in the pictures. This visual support helped students organize their ideas and determine what to say, thereby facilitating the production of spoken language. The use of concrete visual stimuli was particularly beneficial for students who initially experienced difficulty developing ideas during speaking activities.

Furthermore, picture-based activities appeared to support students' confidence and participation in speaking tasks. The availability of a clear visual context reduced the cognitive difficulty associated with deciding on a topic and generating content spontaneously. As a result, students were able to participate more actively and were less hesitant when expressing their ideas in front of the class. The repeated use of pictures as speaking prompts also provided opportunities for students to practice producing language in a meaningful context. Such practice contributed to the development of fluency, as students gradually became more capable of producing longer and more coherent utterances.

The use of pictures also supported vocabulary development. The visual representation of objects, activities, people, and situations provided students with contextual cues that helped them recall and apply vocabulary relevant to the speaking task. Instead of learning vocabulary in isolation, students were encouraged to use words in relation to what they observed and described. This contextualized practice enabled them to select vocabulary more appropriately while expressing their ideas. At the same time, repeated speaking practice encouraged students to expand their lexical choices and communicate their messages more effectively.

In addition, the picture-based activities contributed to improvements in sentence structure and overall organization of spoken responses. When students described or interpreted pictures, they were required to arrange words into meaningful sentences and connect their ideas logically. Repeated practice allowed them to become more familiar with constructing sentences while maintaining the meaning of their intended messages. The visual sequence or contextual relationship presented in the pictures also helped students organize their descriptions more systematically, which contributed to greater coherence in their spoken production.

Overall, the statistical findings and classroom observations indicate that the implementation of pictures as instructional media was effective in improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas. The increase in the mean score from

55.75 to 83.25, the 27.50-point mean gain, and the statistically significant paired samples t-test result ($t = 17.626$, $df = 19$, $p < 0.001$) provide strong empirical evidence of improvement after the treatment. The decrease in score variability further suggests that the students' performances became more consistent. From an instructional perspective, pictures provided concrete contexts, stimulated idea generation, supported vocabulary use, encouraged fluency, facilitated sentence construction, and increased students' engagement in speaking activities. Therefore, picture-based instruction can be considered a useful instructional approach for supporting the development of speaking skills among seventh-grade EFL learners.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it was concluded that the use of pictures was effective in improving the speaking skills of the seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kakas. The study, which employed a one-group pre-test and post-test design, showed a significant increase in the students' speaking performance after the treatment. The mean score rose substantially from 55.75 in the pre-test to 83.25 in the post-test, with a mean difference of 27.50 points. The paired samples t-test further confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

This improvement was evident across the four assessed components: fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. The students became more confident in speaking English, produced longer and more meaningful utterances, and showed greater willingness to participate in speaking activities. The use of pictures helped reduce the students' anxiety, provided clear visual context, and enabled them to generate ideas more easily. These findings indicated that pictures served as an effective and engaging instructional media for developing speaking skills in an EFL classroom.

The results of this study were consistent with previous research which highlighted the benefits of visual media in language learning. In particular, the current findings supported Liando et al. (2022), who found that pictures as a learning media stimulated students' perceptions directly and made the learning process more interesting. Similarly, the improvement aligned with Hampp (2019), who explained that authentic media could increase students' interest and help integrate several language skills through active practice.

In conclusion, the use of pictures proved to be a valuable teaching tool that not only improved the students' speaking ability but also created a more enjoyable and less intimidating learning environment. This study contributed to the understanding that visual aids such as pictures can play an important role in enhancing oral communication skills at the junior high school level.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this research.

Authors' Contribution

Prameswari George Rompas: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing-review & editing.

Tini Mogea: Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Formal analysis, Writing-review & editing.

Paula Hampp: Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing-review & editing.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Statement of the Use of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used only for Indonesian-English translation and language-related assistance. AI tools were not used for data analysis, data interpretation, research methodology, or the formulation of the research findings and conclusions. All analytical processes, interpretations, and academic judgments were conducted by the authors.

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