



Effective Strategies in Chinese Language Learning: Improving Speaking Ability with Picture Media for Elementary Students at Universitas Sebelas Maret

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Abstract

Chinese is one of the difficult languages to learn, especially for foreign speakers. Therefore, research was conducted to find an easy and effective way to learn Chinese speaking. This study focuses on elementary level students at Sebelas Maret University, examining how effective strategies, specifically the use of picture media, can improve their Chinese speaking skills. The research method analyzes the effectiveness of visual media in increasing students learning motivation and understanding of the content. By collecting qualitative and quantitative data from learning sessions conducted with and without visual media, significant differences in students learning performance were found between the two methods. The study's theoretical contributions include advancing the understanding of visual media's role in language acquisition and providing a framework for integrating visual aids into language teaching. It confirms that visual media can significantly enhance students participation, understanding, and memorization of learning content. Additionally, the speaking skills of students who used the visual media learning method improved markedly compared to those who did not. This demonstrates that visual media is a beneficial strategy for Chinese language learning at the elementary level, offering practical insights for teachers to enhance the efficiency of the learning process and improve student outcomes.

Keywords: Chinese Language; Effective Strategy; Learning; Picture Media; Speaking Ability

Introduction

In the era of globalization, foreign language proficiency is critical to preparing for competition in the job market, and Mandarin is one of them. The role of Mandarin is becoming increasingly vital today, especially in the context of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and China, which are proliferating under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, especially in the sectors of trade, tourism and education.

Chinese language learning has become a significant focus in many educational institutions worldwide, including Universitas Sebelas Maret. That has fuelled the need to develop practical communication skills in Chinese, especially in an increasingly connected global context. In this university context, the basic level of Chinese language

learning is of particular interest, as it provides a solid foundation for subsequent progress in language proficiency.

Despite its importance, learning Chinese is often tricky, especially for those with prior experience. Mentoring is vital for students just starting to learn Chinese. This process includes reading, speaking, listening, and writing activities, with speaking and writing often considered the most challenging.

Active interaction between lecturers and students in language learning is also highly emphasized, where both parties should be actively involved in discussions about the material. Consistent practice is necessary to improve speaking ability.

Chinese language learning at the primary level requires effective strategies, including using picture media to enrich the learning experience by evoking visual imagination and deepening the understanding of the Chinese context. The use of picture media is an effective strategy for improving Chinese speaking ability at the primary level. Picture media facilitates visual comprehension, a natural way for students to understand and remember vocabulary and phrases in a foreign language. Thus, integrating picture media into the learning process can increase students' motivation and engagement and help them acquire the best speaking skills.

Although many learning methods exist, challenges in improving speaking skills remain. Many students need more confidence or experience difficulties conveying ideas orally in Mandarin. Therefore, lecturers must exert effort to create an exciting and supportive learning environment to keep students motivated. In addition, innovative and effective learning strategies are needed to overcome these obstacles. This study aims to explore and develop effective strategies for using picture media to improve Chinese speaking ability among primary-level students at this university. Thus, the results of this study hoped to positively contribute to curriculum development and more effective Chinese language learning practices at Universitas Sebelas Maret.

Research Methods

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to explore and assess the effectiveness of using picture media in improving speaking skills in Chinese language learning among primary level students. The study was designed as a Classroom Action Research (CAR) by following Kemmis' cyclical process, which includes four steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

<p>Apakah dengan adanya latihan membuat cerita mendeskripsikan sebuah gambar dapat membantu dalam meningkatkan skill berbicara dalam mata kuliah berbicara? *</p> <p><input type="radio"/> YA</p> <p><input type="radio"/> TIDAK</p>	<p>Apakah dengan adanya latihan membuat cerita mendeskripsikan sebuah gambar dapat membantu dalam meningkatkan skill berbicara dalam mata kuliah berbicara? *</p> <p><input type="radio"/> YA</p> <p><input type="radio"/> TIDAK</p>
<p>Jika membantu, berikan sebuah alasan mengapa dengan adanya latihan tersebut dapat membantu anda meningkatkan skill dalam berbicara?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jawab pertanyaan ini jika jawaban pertanyaan pertama adalah YA • Minimal jawaban adalah 5 kalimat <p>Jawaban Anda _____</p>	<p>Jika membantu, berikan sebuah alasan mengapa dengan adanya latihan tersebut dapat membantu anda meningkatkan skill dalam berbicara?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jawab pertanyaan ini jika jawaban pertanyaan pertama adalah YA • Minimal jawaban adalah 5 kalimat <p>Jawaban Anda _____</p>
<p>Jika tidak, berikan alasan mengapa metode tersebut tidak dapat meningkatkan skill dalam berbicara?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jawab pertanyaan ini jika jawaban pertanyaan pertama adalah TIDAK • Minimal jawaban adalah 5 kalimat <p>Jawaban Anda _____</p>	<p>Jika tidak, berikan alasan mengapa metode tersebut tidak dapat meningkatkan skill dalam berbicara?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jawab pertanyaan ini jika jawaban pertanyaan pertama adalah TIDAK • Minimal jawaban adalah 5 kalimat <p>Jawaban Anda _____</p>

Figure 1. Question by Googleform

This study's Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted following Kemmis' cyclical process. Each cycle includes four steps: (1) planning, (2) action, (3) observation, and (4) reflection—several steps conducted following The research. The research included a preliminary study before analyzing and identifying problems, followed by planning, action, observation, and reflection. From the preliminary study, the researcher identified problems in the learning process, mainly speaking skills. The researcher described the problems found in teaching and learning to speak.

The focus of this study is to understand how the use of picture media as a teaching tool affects students speaking ability in Mandarin. The study aims to identify changes in student engagement, motivation, and speaking performance when visual aids are integrated into the learning process. The unit of analysis in this study consists of elementary-level students from the Department of Chinese Language and Culture at Universitas Sebelas Maret. A total of 30 students participated as respondents, most of whom were not of Chinese descent and had just started learning Chinese upon entering the program.

Data was collected using a mixed methods approach:

1. Quantitative Data: An online survey was conducted using Google forms. The survey included questions designed to evaluate students experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of picture media in Chinese language learning.
2. Qualitative Data: In addition to the survey, classroom observations were conducted to gather insights on students participation and engagement during lessons using picture media. Interviews with students were also conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their personal experiences and challenges in learning Chinese.

Data analysis was conducted through the following steps:

1. Quantitative Analysis: Responses from the Google forms survey were statistically analyzed to identify trends and measure the overall impact of the picture media on students speaking skills. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize the data.
2. Qualitative Analysis: Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to students engagement, motivation, and speaking performance. Thematic analysis helped in understanding the nuances of how the picture media facilitated the learning process.

Classroom Action Research Cycle:

1. Planning: Based on the preliminary study, problems in the teaching and learning process, especially in speaking skills, were identified. A detailed plan was developed to integrate picture media into the curriculum.
2. Action: The plan was implemented in the classroom, with students engaging in activities involving the description and discussion of pictures to improve their speaking skills.
3. Observation: During the implementation, observations were made to monitor students reactions, participation levels, and difficulties encountered.
4. Reflection: After each cycle, reflection is conducted to assess the effectiveness of the strategies used and to make necessary adjustments for the next cycle.

Using this comprehensive approach, this study was able to demonstrate that the use of picture media significantly improved students speaking ability in Chinese. The findings provide valuable insights in the development of effective teaching strategies and the improvement of language learning curriculum.

Results and Discussion

In the era of globalization, proficiency in foreign languages is crucial for preparing oneself to compete in the job market, with Mandarin being one of the critical languages. Mandarin has gained significant popularity in Indonesia and other parts of the world, becoming a booming language in several Asian, European, and American countries. As the official language of the United Nations, Mandarin is recognized widely and used globally. With China's increasing national strength and influence in the surrounding regions, there is a growing interest among foreigners in learning Mandarin, leading to a gradual rise in international students. However, challenges arise, such as international students' difficulties in learning Mandarin, which pose significant obstacles to cultural exchange.

Mandarin is the second language to enter Indonesia after English. In the 1990s, Mandarin began to enter Indonesia due to the ancestors of Chinese descent in Indonesia,

originating from the word Zhong Hua in Mandarin. Zhong Hua, in the Hokkien dialect, is pronounced as Tiong Hoa. Mandarin is a unique and fascinating language. Mandarin distinguishes between written language (Wen) and spoken language (Yu). This distinction expanded to differentiate between written characters (zi) and spoken words (Hua).

The role of Mandarin has become increasingly vital, especially in the context of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and China, particularly under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, notably in the trade, tourism, and education sectors. Mandarin language learning has become a primary focus in many educational institutions worldwide, including Sebelas Maret University, driven by the need to develop practical communication skills in Mandarin, particularly in an increasingly interconnected global context. Mandarin language learning encompasses reading, speaking, listening, and writing. According to research findings, speaking and writing are the most challenging subjects, with few effective learning techniques available.

Speaking is the ability to speak fluently, which presupposes knowledge of language features and the ability to process information and language. According to Chaney (1998:13), speaking is constructing and sharing meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols in various contexts. According to Bailey (2000), speaking is an interaction process where speakers in international students. However, challenges arise, such as international students' difficulties in learning Mandarin, which pose significant obstacles to cultural exchange.

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Since 2007, the State Council Academic Degree Committee Office has approved the establishment of International Education Master's degrees in Mandarin at 24 universities, such as Peking University. Over 100 institutions in China offer International

Education Master's degrees in Mandarin. Curriculum construction is crucial for improving quality and advancing teaching reforms in Chinese International Education Master's programs. Research and practice in curriculum construction undoubtedly play a vital role in enhancing teaching quality. The language learning strategy involves a structured plan that incorporates various elements, such as objectives, materials, methods, tools, and evaluation, to achieve specific learning goals (Fatimah & Kartikasari, 2018). According to Oxford (2017), there are six main strategies for language learning:

1. **Memory Strategy:** Focuses on techniques for memorization and recall, such as creating mental associations, using imagery and sounds, reviewing thoroughly, and incorporating physical actions.
2. **Cognitive Strategy:** Involves mental processes and thinking activities, such as practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and constructing input and output structures.
3. **Compensation Strategy:** Includes techniques to overcome limitations in language use, such as making educated guesses and addressing gaps in speaking or writing.
4. **Metacognitive Strategy:** Emphasizes planning, organizing, and evaluating one's own learning, enabling students to manage and assess their language learning process and plan assignments.
5. **Affective Strategy:** Aims to reduce anxiety, motivate oneself, and regulate emotions during language learning.
6. **Social Strategy:** Helps students interact with others and understand the target language's culture through techniques such as asking questions, collaborating with others, and demonstrating empathy.

Teachers must rely more on lecture-based teaching methods in this rapidly evolving digital technology era. Instead, they expected to learn and utilize technology as a learning medium. According to Sudjana & Rivai (1992), the benefits of learning media in student learning include making learning more engaging, thus fostering motivation. Learning materials become clearer in meaning, making it easier for students to understand and master, thus enabling them to achieve learning goals. Teaching methods have become more varied, and lecturers are not relying solely on lecture methods. Students can engage in more learning activities. The learning media referred to here is picture media pictures are one of the visual aids that can support and help students understand the lessons explained by teachers in speaking instruction. As part of visual aids, pictures have many functions in the teaching and learning process. According to Evison (1992), a picture describes what something looks like. A picture represents something, such as a person or scene. Pictures can also be a key element in communicative and interactive classrooms. According to Hamalik (1988), pictures are effective visual media that are very easy to use. They can help students understand ideas clearly.

Contemporary culture increasingly relies on visual media due to its ability to instantly convey messages, photos, and other information globally. Modern technologies, such as computers and interactive whiteboards, offer educators enhanced opportunities to incorporate visual materials into their lessons. Regardless of the chosen teaching method, the use of visual aids significantly impacts the learning experience. Today's students are less receptive to monotonous lectures where they passively take notes; instead, they seek active engagement in the educational process.

In this dynamic setting, teachers take on the role of performers, inviting students to participate in an interactive classroom experience. From simple gestures and pantomimes to pictures, photographs, and slides, these visual elements serve to make learning more engaging and meaningful for students. Research by Thomas and Keinders supports the notion that visual materials enhance lesson appeal and benefit both educators and learners. Carney and Levin further argue that visual aids act as "mental scaffolds," aiding teachers in presenting accurate concepts and making the learning experience more compelling.

Using picture media in the learning process dramatically helps improve speaking proficiency. Through questionnaires distributed to elementary students at Sebelas Maret University, 100% agreed with this notion. Describing a picture is one of the most effective ways to sharpen students' Mandarin language skills and enhance their creativity in composing coherent stories. In oral classes conducted by native speakers and assisted by local instructors, native speakers usually use additional supporting pictures taken from Baidu (a Chinese internet platform similar to Google) to facilitate students' understanding of vocabulary meanings. Learning directly from native Mandarin-speaking teachers is highly beneficial and minimizes errors in Mandarin speaking.

Educational media can be categorized into various types. According to Locates and Atkinson (1984), there are seven main categories: print media; graphic media, which encompass overhead transparencies, charts/graphs, models/dioramas, maps, globes, and drawings; photographic media; audio media; television/video; computers; and simulation and games. For small-group interactions, media based on sensory experience can be divided into five types, as identified by Nation (2001). These include simulation activities, which encompass games, role plays, and simulations; visual forms, including photographic, graphic, and photographic combinations; audio forms; audiovisual or multimedia techniques; and media that engage other senses, such as objects, specimens, and models.

This study was conducted with elementary-level students from the Department of Chinese Language and Culture at Universitas Sebelas Maret, focusing on the use of picture media to improve Chinese speaking skills. A total of 30 students, the majority of whom were not of Chinese descent and had just started learning Chinese upon entering the program, participated as respondents in this study.

1	Timestamp	Nama	Kelas	Apakah dengan adanya	Jika membantu, berikan	Jika tidak, berikan alasan
2	28/04/2024 19:36:55	Michelle Asher Dian	Semester 2/ A	YA	Karena kita juga bisa sambil berbicara sendiri keti	
3	28/04/2024 19:37:32	Anis Kusumaningrum Da	2 A	YA	Dapat membantu mahasiswa untuk membuat kali	
4	28/04/2024 19:38:07	Loveta Putri	A	YA	Karena dengan adanya	-
5	28/04/2024 19:38:45	FERNANDO PALIM	A	YA	Dengan adanya diskripsi gambar, maka secara tic	Terlebih lagi, hal ini berguna bagi mahasiswa bah
6	28/04/2024 19:40:21	Candrika Widya	2A	YA	memperkuat ingatan kos	-
7	28/04/2024 19:41:47	Aulia Sekar Arinda	A	YA	Iya, karena meskipun adi	
8	28/04/2024 19:48:01	Odilia Geerta	A	YA	Dengan melihat gambar, kita dipaksa untuk memit	
9	28/04/2024 20:14:27	sofie alfaiza	2B	YA	menemukan kosakata be	
10	28/04/2024 20:14:45	Rafael Biry Ingstrada	B	YA	Karena dapat meningkatkan kosakata, Mengemb	
11	28/04/2024 20:18:44	Tabitha Christabel Wahy	2A	YA	Karena dengan memikir	-
12	28/04/2024 20:25:56	Muhammad Febrizky Ris	A	YA	Karena bisa berlatih berbicara. Bisa juga berlatih i	
13	28/04/2024 20:29:18	Shalma Azzahra Khoirun	A	YA	Terlatih dalam membuat kalimat dengan baik dan	
14	28/04/2024 20:30:44	Angel	A	YA	Karena menurut saya bisa membuat lebih mengin	
15	28/04/2024 20:38:28	Shafira Belva	B	YA	Menurut saya itu membantu karena itu dapat melat	
16	28/04/2024 21:00:24	Dinda Ayuni Larashati	B	YA	Iya, karena saat mendeskripsikan gambar dapat r	
17	28/04/2024 21:01:38	Risqi Zatiful Isfandi	B	YA	Karena saat membuat ce	-
18	29/04/2024 4:48:57	Auwally Syahwal Aurellia	A	YA	Karena dapat mengasah	-
19	29/04/2024 8:12:56	Kinanti Olivia Anjani	A	YA	Sebagai sarana pembias	Tidak
20	29/04/2024 9:17:44	Salwa Humaira Arsha Pu	A	YA	Karena secara tidak lang	-
21	03/05/2024 12:12:26	Oryza sativa	2B	YA	Dengan melihat gambar	-
22	03/05/2024 12:22:36	Auwally Syahwal Aurellia	A	YA	Dengan adanya mendeskripsikan sebuah gambar	
23	03/05/2024 12:05:20	Shalma Azzahra Khoirun A	A	YA	Membuat imajinasi kita tenai	Melatih dalam men

Figure 2. Respondent questionnaire results

The study is entitled "Effective Strategies in Chinese Language Learning: Improving Speaking Ability with Picture Media for Elementary Students at Sebelas Maret University." To collect data, the researcher used a questionnaire with the main question: "Does the exercise of creating a story by describing a picture help improve speaking skills in speaking courses?" All respondents answered "YES," providing various reasons to support the effectiveness of this exercise. Some respondents explained that the picture-describing exercise allowed them to speak independently and imagine freely, thereby increasing their confidence in using Chinese and their ability to structure sentences. They felt that this method helped in creating sentences based on pictures and speaking in a storytelling manner, which facilitated sharing their thoughts and ideas. It was also considered effective for practicing pronunciation, reinforcing vocabulary recall, and expanding vocabulary by identifying elements in pictures not covered in textbooks.

Additionally, some respondents noted that describing pictures helped them remember new vocabulary and improve sentence structure and pronunciation. They also felt that this exercise reduced their nervousness and increased their confidence in speaking. By practicing story creation and picture description, students became more familiar with using the vocabulary they had learned and felt more confident in their speaking abilities. Respondents also highlighted that this exercise strengthens analytical skills and trains the brain in vocabulary usage. They felt that describing pictures indirectly trains them to speak correctly and helps in remembering vocabulary and grammar more effectively. Overall, the results indicate that students agree that picture media is a very useful tool for learning to speak at the elementary level.

Moreover, the number of students in a class also affects the effectiveness of Mandarin-speaking learning. Having too many students in a class may prevent teachers from focusing intensively on students' speaking difficulties and may disrupt the conducive

learning environment during practice sessions. Innovative and colorful picture usage is also more engaging and easier to memorize.

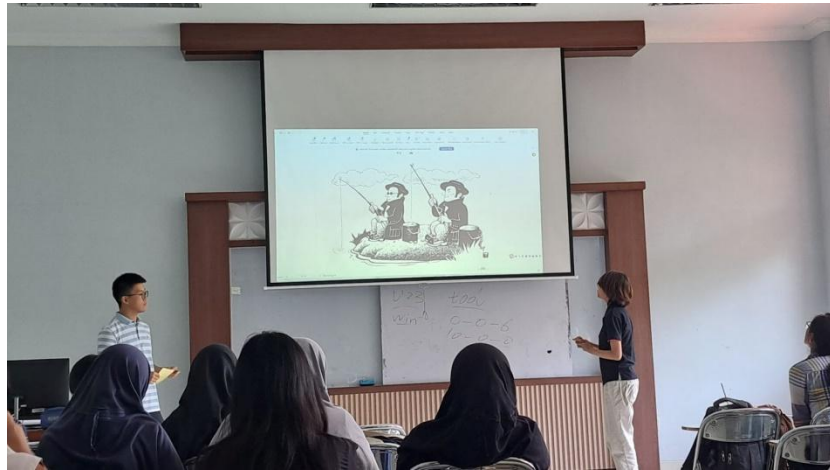


Figure 3. Learning in the classroom

However, teaching speaking is a challenging task. Students often encounter difficulties such as

1. running out of ideas on what to say, leading them to stay silent,
2. feeling embarrassed, uncomfortable, and lacking confidence if they make mistakes,
3. fearing being laughed at by classmates if they make errors in class and
4. being unaccustomed to speaking in class due to limited pronunciation and vocabulary skills.

In teaching Mandarin, "pictures" or images are among the most frequently utilized media for enhancing speaking skills. A monotonous approach to Mandarin instruction is generally discouraged. Evidence suggests that incorporating pictures into Mandarin lessons can effectively improve students' speaking abilities. According to Gerlach and Ely (1980), pictures offer several advantages: they are cost-effective and readily available, provide shared experiences for groups, assist in preventing and correcting misconceptions, help maintain focus and develop critical thinking, and stimulate further study and research. Additionally, pictures are easily manipulated, making them a powerful educational tool. However, it is important to acknowledge that pictures also have limitations, particularly when illustrating abstract concepts or vocabulary, where they may not always be suitable. The importance of teachers being confident in using and creating learning media tailored to students and the material is acknowledged. Kindergarten education should adhere to the core value of being "child-centered" and should create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment for non-Chinese-speaking students. This approach allows children to naturally transition from a non-Chinese-speaking environment to a Chinese-speaking classroom, helping them quickly build confidence in learning Chinese.

To address these difficulties, researchers have a solution: teach students to speak by encouraging them to speak up. One solution is to use pictures, so the researchers

want to conduct research using pictures as a strategy to enhance students' speaking skills. The reason for choosing pictures in this study is because they are easy to find, can stimulate students to be more active, and are very helpful in teaching and learning activities, especially in conversation classes.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of picture media in enhancing Chinese speaking skills among elementary students at Sebelas Maret University. The use of visual aids effectively improves students' speaking abilities by facilitating vocabulary recall and increasing engagement. **Understanding Visual Media's Role:** The study confirms that visual aids enhance cognitive processing and retention of language, supporting the theory that visual stimuli aid comprehension and memory in language learning, **Framework for Integration:** It provides a practical framework for incorporating picture media into language teaching, emphasizing its impact on creating engaging and effective learning environments.

Curriculum Integration: Incorporate picture media systematically into language curricula to boost student engagement and comprehension. **Teacher Training:** Provide professional development for educators on using visual aids effectively in teaching, **Interactive Learning:** Foster interactive classroom activities that use picture media to encourage active student participation and reduce anxiety, **Further Research:** Conduct additional studies to explore the long-term effects of picture media and its impact on different language skills and learner demographics.

In summary, the use of picture media represents a valuable strategy in Chinese language learning, particularly at the elementary level. By enhancing visual comprehension and increasing motivation, picture media addresses key challenges in language acquisition and offers practical solutions for improving students' speaking abilities. The recommendations provided aim to support educators in implementing these effective strategies and contribute to the ongoing development of innovative and effective language learning practices.

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