The Role of Visual Media as a Bridge Between Imagery and Language in the Context of Writing Instruction

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Abstract. This study highlights the importance of improving writing skills among elementary school students, particularly considering the persistent challenges many students face in generating ideas and constructing coherent, logical narratives. The primary focus of this research is to examine the role of visual media as a bridge between visual forms and verbal expression in the context of writing instruction. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with an exploratory case study approach, the study involved two teachers and fifth-grade students from SKH 2 KTG and SKH 45 GMK in Central Kalimantan. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of students' written work. Findings indicate that visual media significantly supports students' cognitive processes, especially in developing ideas, organizing narrative structures sequentially, and reducing affective barriers that often hinder writing. Images were found to serve not only as a stimulus for creativity but also as a tool that connects students lived experiences with the narratives they produce. For further development, future research is recommended to explore the cognitive processes involved in transforming visual stimuli into verbal expression and to examine the effectiveness of more dynamic visual media, such as videos or animation enhancing students' writing skills. Such strategies are believed to broaden the horizon of understanding regarding adaptive, inclusive, and contextually relevant multimodal learning in contemporary education.

Keywords: media; image; visual; language; writing instruction

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of global education, writing is no longer understood merely as a linguistic skill; it has evolved into a representation of complex higher-order thinking processes. Writing reflects how individuals respond to reality, form arguments, and structure ideas into communicative and systematic forms (Mondolalo et al., 2023). This ability involves the integration of various competencies such as critical thinking, conceptual understanding, and creative expression (Astuti & Rambe, 2024).

Nevertheless, in practice, writing remains one of the most complex aspects of language learning to teach and to learn. Students' difficulties in writing span multiple dimensions, from ideation (the ability to generate and develop ideas), text structure and organization, to mechanical aspects such as spelling, diction, and punctuation (Wilda et al., 2025). These barriers are not solely due to weak command of language structures but also to students' low engagement in the reflective thinking processes essential for writing (Nurfadhillah et al., 2022). This issue is exacerbated by pedagogical approaches to writing that are still dominated by one-directional expository models, which do not provide exploratory space for students to construct meaning in contextual and creative ways.

This situation underscores the urgent need for innovation in writing pedagogy that is more responsive to the characteristics of 21st-century learners. One of the main challenges lies in designing instructional strategies that can bridge the gap between students' visual thinking abilities and their capacity to compose linguistic expressions in written form (Haryanti et al., 2022). Here lies the importance of integrating multimodal approaches, particularly through the use of images as connectors between visual and verbal representations (Abidin, 2022). With their ability to trigger associative meanings, stimulate imagination, and facilitate narrative structuring, images offer significant pedagogical potential in supporting the intuitive and meaningful construction of text especially for students who struggle to transition from ideas to written language.

The urgency for developing new approaches to writing instruction is increasingly evident with rising awareness of Indonesian students' weak literacy competencies, particularly in writing. Data from the 2023 Computer-Based National Assessment (ANBK), released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), show that the majority of students face difficulties in developing ideas coherently and conveying them deeply in written form. These weaknesses reflect not only a gap in

language structure and vocabulary mastery but also a lack of narrative and reflective thinking skills. On a global scale, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report by the OECD (2022) indicates that Indonesian students' literacy skills especially in written expression still lag far behind the OECD average. Students often struggle to construct arguments, maintain thematic consistency, and apply logical textual cohesion (Maspuroh et al., 2023).

This situation invites critical reflection on the effectiveness of conventional approaches to teaching writing, which have long emphasized structural and mechanical aspects while neglecting cognitive and visual dimensions. In an era of educational digitalization where information is absorbed more quickly through visual and multimodal media traditional text-based approaches are showing their limitations (Tembhurne & Diwan, 2021). Twenty-first-century learners not only live in environments saturated with visual stimuli but also develop high visual-spatial intelligence. Thus, writing instruction that fails to adapt risks creating cognitive dissonance and lowering learning motivation (Putriana et al., 2022).

In this context, the use of images as a pedagogical strategy in writing instruction is gaining increasing attention. Images, as visual representations, are not merely illustrative aids but constitute a semiotic system with the potential to link students' mental ideas with written language. The theory of multimodality developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, and further updated in learning contexts, posits that meaning is constructed not only through verbal language but also through visuals, gestures, and other media (Sulistyaningrum et al., 2025). Within this framework, images function not only as stimuli for imagination but also as transmediation tools that enable students to transfer meaning from one form of representation to another from visual to linguistic (Kusmiarti et al., 2024). This approach opens space for more contextual, creative, and meaningful writing instruction.

However, literature reviews reveal that the implementation of images in writing instruction is still often positioned as a supplementary tool rather than a foundational element in meaning construction. Most studies focus on how images affect student motivation or serve as prompts for free writing activities. Although these studies are valuable, they have not deeply explored the cognitive and linguistic functions of images in bridging the transition from idea to written narrative structure. This highlights a significant research gap: the lack of conceptual and practical exploration of how images can function as a semiotic bridge between visual representation systems and linguistic systems in the writing process (Dewi, 2023). The integration of visual media in writing instruction has gained growing prominence in contemporary educational literature. The presence of visual elements such as narrative images or contextual illustrations can enhance students' ability to map ideas more coherently, build cohesive textual flows, and enrich their vocabulary expression (Nugroho et al., 2024).

This offers a theoretical contribution by proposing a transmediation framework based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, to understand the role of images in the meaning construction and text production process. In this approach, images are not merely treated as visual stimuli but as primary sources of meaning with narrative, symbolic, and interpretive potential that can be explored by students through teacher scaffolding and classroom social interaction. The transmediation process enables students to transfer meaning from visual to verbal form through a series of reflective and collaborative activities. In this way, students' writing skills develop not only technically but also cognitively and metacognitively. This approach is expected to enhance the transformative effectiveness of writing instruction, especially in the context of primary education that demands multimodal and differentiated approaches.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to conceptually and empirically analyze the role of images as a bridge between visual representation systems and language in writing instruction. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify how image media can facilitate students' cognitive processes in developing writing ideas; (2) explore the role of images in constructing narrative structure and coherence in student texts; and (3) develop a pedagogical framework based on visual-verbal transmediation in writing instruction. The benefits of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on multimodal literacy and transmediation in language education by integrating visual and linguistic semiotics.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with an exploratory case-study design to investigate in depth the role of visual media in

writing instruction. It was conducted at SKH 2 KTG and SKH 45 GMK in Central Kalimantan, involving two experienced homeroom teachers and 24 fifth-grade students selected purposively. Data-collection techniques included participatory observation to record teacher–student interactions; in-depth interviews to explore both teachers' and students' perceptions and experiences of using images in their writing; and document analysis of the students' written texts produced during image-based activities. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how visual media can facilitate students' cognitive processes in generating writing ideas and enhance narrative cohesion and coherence in their texts.

The collected data were analyzed using a three-step procedure data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing framed by a thematic approach. Analysis was guided by visual-verbal transmediation theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to elucidate how images support students' thinking and writing processes. To ensure the validity of the findings, data triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail were employed. In so doing, this study aims to shed light on how visual media function not merely as illustrative aids but as true bridges between visual representation and language in the writing-learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1. Identifying How Image Media Facilitates Students' Cognitive Processes in Developing Writing Ideas

The findings of this study reveal that the use of image media significantly facilitates students' cognitive processes in constructing and developing writing ideas. Initial data collected at SKH 2 KTG showed that fifth-grade students experienced difficulties initiating writing activities when no visual stimulus was provided. Most students could only produce single descriptive sentences, lacking a structured narrative. However, when image media was introduced as an idea stimulator, there was a noticeable shift in how students responded to writing tasks they began to show signs of idea activation, meaning association, and more varied word choices.

Mrs. DRM, a fifth-grade teacher at SKH 2 KTG, shared that prior to using image media, most students struggled to begin writing activities:

"The children usually only write one or two

sentences, mostly just naming objects or people they see, without any clear story. But since I started using pictures as a trigger, they find it easier to generate ideas and dare to write longer." *(DRM, Grade 5 Teacher at SKH 2 KTG)*

In line with this, Student N explained in an interview:

"I used to be confused about what to write, afraid of making mistakes. But when there's a picture, I start thinking of stories. I saw a picture of a market, and then I remembered going to the market with my mom, so I wrote about that." *(Student N, SKH 2 KTG)*

These statements indicate that images serve not only as visual aids but also as memory triggers and sources of personally meaningful ideas, which students then translate into narrative writing. Classroom observations confirmed that image media functions as a concrete representation that bridges students' visual and verbal thinking processes. When the teacher displayed a picture themed "traditional market," students began identifying familiar objects such as "vegetables," "fish," and "basket," and actions like "buying" and "selling" (see Figure 1). This activity illustrates how students construct preliminary understanding through visual association, which is then internalized into written language ideas. This aligns with dual coding theory, which posits that combining visual and verbal representations strengthens cognitive processing showed in Figure 1.

Mrs. DRM emphasized that image media has become an essential tool in breaking through students' cognitive blockages when writing. She explained:

"When asked to write directly, students often go silent or are confused about how to start. But when I show a picture, they get excited. Some immediately say, 'This is at the beach, Ma'am!' or 'This looks like my grandma's house!'—so the ideas just come. They start with one or two words, then build full sentences, even paragraphs. For me, this acts like visual assistance that substitutes verbal instructions, which are often ineffective for them." *(DRM, Grade 5 Teacher at SKH 2 KTG)*

Similarly, another student, T, shared:

"I used to feel confused when asked to write, scared I'd make mistakes. But when I saw the

Figure 1. Vegetables and Fish in a Traditional Market

picture, I remembered going to the market with my mom. So I just wrote about that." *(Student T, Grade 5, SKH 2 KTG)*

This indicates that images not only function as visual aids but also as bridges connecting external stimuli to students' episodic memories. This process allows the emergence of personally meaningful ideas that can be developed into complete narratives. In this context, images act as cognitive and affective triggers that help students construct story structures more naturally and contextually. Documentation of students' written work before and after the introduction of image media shows a significant improvement in writing length, vocabulary variety, and idea cohesion. Before intervention, most texts were limited to 2–3 repetitive sentences. Afterward, the texts developed into paragraphs with a beginning, middle, and end. Students also began sequencing events and adding emotional expressions such as "I was happy helping my mom" or "I was scared when I saw the big fish."

Meanwhile, at SKH 45 GMK, the strategy of using sequential images proved effective in helping students develop ordered and cohesive writing. The teacher displayed four sequential images depicting morning activities from waking up, showering, having breakfast, to going to school. Students observed each image, named the visible activities, and discussed them in small groups. Observations revealed that this visual-based discussion encouraged students to develop a clearer and more logical narrative flow.

Mr. RMD, a fifth-grade teacher at SKH 45 GMK, emphasized that using image sequences in writing instruction significantly impacted students' ability to understand narrative structure. He explained that prior to using image media, many students were unable to logically organize

stories. However, consistent use of sequential images brought about a marked change in how students structured their narratives:

"Previously, students often mixed up the sequence of events. Sometimes the ending came first. But with image sequences, they understand what to write first and what follows. It really helps them grasp that a story has a beginning, middle, and end. Their thoughts become more organized." *(RMD, Grade 5 Teacher at SKH 45 GMK)*

This was echoed by student F, who expressed increased confidence in writing through image-based prompts:

"When I see pictures, it feels like reading a story without letters. So I can tell the story in my own words. I'm not afraid of making mistakes anymore." *(Student F, Grade 5, SKH 45 GMK)*

The study shows that image media plays a vital role as a cognitive and affective facilitator in the writing process, especially for students with special needs at the elementary level. At SKH 2 KTG, students struggled to begin writing without visual stimuli. Their initial texts were limited to single descriptive sentences, lacking narrative development. With image media, however, there was a notable increase in idea activation, idea organization, and verbal fluency in writing.

Mrs. DRM described image media as a form of visual assistance nonverbal instructional support that effectively substitutes or complements abstract verbal directions for students with special needs. Information processed through both visual and verbal cognitive channels is more easily remembered and reconstructed in written form (Lestari & Sari, 2025). In this context, images become cognitive bridges connecting visual stimuli with students' episodic memories, as

Figure 2. Series of Images at the Traditional Market

evidenced by student N recalling a trip to the market with his mother. Empirical observation further revealed that students could name concrete objects in the pictures and use them as starting points to build stories. This indicates that images are not only idea stimulators but also narrative scaffolds that help students think in ordered and logical ways. This finding is supported by recent studies showing that visual representation can enhance children's narrative abilities through cognitive activation and systematic idea framing (Sophian et al., 2025).

This transformation is clearly reflected in students' writing before and after the use of image media. Previously limited to two or three descriptive sentences, their texts developed into cohesive, structured, and expressive paragraphs. Students constructed narratives with clear plots (beginning-middle-end) and included emotional and personal experiences, such as feelings of joy, fear, or longing (Muslih et al., 2025). In this sense, images are not merely idea triggers but also transmediation bridges between visual experiences and verbal language. The integration of visual and verbal representations enhances long-term memory retention and recall (Widada et al., 2019).

Thus, the use of image media in writing instruction functions not only as an instructional aid but also as a holistic pedagogical approach. Images integrate cognitive and affective aspects into a unified learning process. They help students generate ideas, organize narratives, express emotions, and build greater confidence in writing. This strategy becomes particularly relevant in the context of Child-Friendly Schools, where learning

approaches must be adaptive to students' psychological needs and foster inclusive self-expression (Setiyadi et al., 2025). Therefore, image media deserves to be considered one of the key strategies in the development of foundational literacy, particularly in writing skills at the primary education level.

RQ2. Exploring the Role of Images in Structuring and Enhancing Narrative Coherence in Student Texts

The use of image media in writing instruction plays a crucial role in helping students especially those with special needs construct well-structured narratives and ensure coherence across sections of their texts. A solid narrative structure includes a clear beginning, middle, and end, along with logically connected ideas. In practice, many students struggle to create a continuous and organized storyline, particularly when relying solely on verbal instructions. Visual media serve as a bridging tool to address this gap.

At SKH 45 GMK, the use of sequential images depicting daily activities proved effective in helping students grasp the chronological order of events. These images visually illustrated routine steps such as waking up, bathing, having breakfast, and going to school. Mr. RMD, the fifth-grade teacher, reported that prior to the introduction of sequential images, students frequently mixed up the story order:

"The children often jumbled the sequence of events. Sometimes what should be the ending was written at the beginning. But with the image sequence, they now know what to write first and what comes next. It really helps them understand that stories have a beginning, middle, and end. Their thinking becomes more organized." *(RMD, Grade 5 Teacher, SKH 45 GMK)*

This statement highlights that images serve not only as idea prompts but also as cognitive frameworks guiding students to write more systematically. Classroom observations revealed that students began naming the activities in the images sequentially and then expanded them into coherent paragraphs. This indicates that images act as scaffolding tools in narrative structure development (Setiyadi, 2020). A similar phenomenon occurred at SKH 2 KTG, where Ms. DRM, a fifth-grade teacher, noted that many students initially lacked understanding of how to develop a structured story. They tended to stop at isolated object descriptions with no sentence-to-

sentence continuity. However, when images were introduced, a significant improvement was observed in their narrative flow.

"The kids would sometimes just write one or two sentences like 'this is mother', 'this is the market', and stop there. But after the images were introduced, they started connecting the story: why they went to the market, what they bought, how they felt. I saw firsthand how images helped them develop ideas and write a full story from beginning to end." *(DRM, Grade 5 Teacher, SKH 2 KTG)*

This reinforces the finding that visual media contribute to forming internal logic in texts. Observations of students' responses to market-themed images showed that they began to include narrative elements such as setting, characters, events, and emotions. For instance, one student wrote:

"I went to the market with my mother. We bought fish. I was scared because the fish was big." *(Student M, Grade 5, SKH 45 GMK)*

This sentence demonstrates a logical chronological sequence with coherent ideas. Concrete visualizations like images assist students in understanding the structure of narrative texts because they present storylines explicitly. Images create visual stimuli that not only activate memory but also prompt students to think about cause-effect relationships and temporal order in stories (Aziezah, 2022). This aligns with Paivio's dual coding theory, which states that simultaneous visual and verbal information processing enhances students' cognitive capacity for organizing and structuring information (Karacan & Akoglu, 2021).

Another equally important aspect is the role of images in reducing affective barriers that often hinder narrative writing. During interviews, one student at SKH 45 GMK, identified as F, shared that images made writing feel more comfortable and increased their confidence:

"When I see a picture, it's like reading a story without letters. So I can tell the story using my own words. I'm not afraid of making mistakes anymore." *(Student F, Grade 5, SKH 45 GMK)*

This statement illustrates how images can reduce both cognitive and emotional load during writing. Many students with special needs experience anxiety from fear of making mistakes

or not knowing how to start. Images provide a clear context, lowering this anxiety. Visual media effectively enhance student confidence and participation in literacy activities (Cacik et al., 2023). Meanwhile, another student at SKH 2 KTG, referred to as N, explained that the images triggered personal memories, which then became the basis for their narrative writing:

"I saw a picture of a market, then I remembered going there with my mom, and I wrote about that." *(Student K, Grade 5, SKH 2 KTG)*

This aligns with Figure 2 and demonstrates the function of images as a bridge between visual stimuli and episodic memory. When images successfully trigger personal memories, students can bring meaningful experiences into their writing. This is critical in narrative writing, as texts rooted in personal experiences are often easier to elaborate and exhibit more complete structures (Nugroho et al., 2024). The use of images in writing instruction holds significant value, particularly for students with special needs, by assisting them in constructing narrative structure and coherence. Many students struggle to develop orderly and connected storylines, especially when relying solely on verbal instructions. Visual media offer a clear context that helps students understand narratives as consisting of a beginning, middle, and end. At SKH 45 GMK, for example, a sequence of images depicting daily activities like waking up, bathing, eating breakfast, and heading to school enabled students to order events chronologically. Before the use of sequential images, students often mixed up story events. According to the fifth-grade teacher, this visual intervention greatly helped students recognize the proper order in writing, enabling them to organize their stories more effectively (Aziezah, 2022).

Furthermore, images function as scaffolding tools that support the development of narrative coherence. Many beginning writers stop at basic descriptions of objects or characters without connecting ideas. When images were introduced as visual stimuli, students showed improvement in linking their ideas into more complete narratives. At SKH 2 KTG, images related to traditional markets helped students write more structured sentences such as: "I went to the market with my mother. We bought fish. I was scared because the fish was big." Images prompted students to develop key narrative components setting, characters, events, emotions resulting in more

coherent storylines. This confirms that images do not only trigger ideas but also support systematic text structuring (Umam & Firdausa, 2022).

Equally important is how images alleviate affective barriers that often block students from writing. Students with special needs often feel anxious or afraid of making mistakes, which hinders their ability to express ideas. With the aid of images, students feel more confident, as images provide clear context and reduce their anxiety. This was evident among students at SKH 45 GMK, who reported feeling more at ease and less fearful of making mistakes when writing with the help of images. This allows them to craft stories in their own words, boosting their confidence. Visual media can thus improve student participation in literacy activities and bolster their confidence in writing (Rorimpandey, 2023).

In addition, images play a critical role in linking students' personal experiences with the texts they produce. When students see pictures of traditional markets, for instance, they recall related personal memories, which they then use as story material. This enriches their narratives, as stories based on personal experience are easier to expand and structurally more complete. Such texts tend to be more vivid and emotionally resonant, allowing students to write more fluently and with clearer structure (Lubis, 2022). Thus, images are not just visual aids but also bridges that connect memory and experience to more coherent and organized narrative texts.

RQ3. Developing a Pedagogical Framework Based on Visual-Verbal Transmediation in Writing Instruction

In the era of multimodal literacy, the visual-verbal transmediation approach has become a new foundation in shaping pedagogical practices that are responsive to students' needs, especially in the context of writing instruction. Transmediation refers to the process of transferring meaning from one form of representation to another, in this case, from a visual representation like images to a verbal form in writing. This process is not merely about media transfer but serves as a cognitive strategy that encourages students to understand, imagine, and construct narratives based on visual stimuli. This approach is highly relevant in the context of inclusive education, where many students, particularly those with language or cognitive barriers, benefit from visual media before being asked to write.

Observations at SKH 2 KTG and SKH 45 GMK show that using images as a starting point

for writing helps students arrange narratives with a more coherent structure. The images act as cognitive anchors, triggering students' memories, associations, and imaginations, which are then articulated in writing. Teachers at both schools utilized a series of images themed around daily activities and traditional markets, which not only provided visual context but also guided students' thinking logically in a chronological and thematic manner. In practice, students who previously struggled to develop ideas were now able to construct sentences that described the sequence of events and the relationships between ideas more coherently.

The pedagogical framework derived from this practice can be described as a three-stage transmediation process. First, the visual exploration stage, where students observe the images in depth and identify key elements such as characters, settings, and activities. Second, the verbal articulation stage, where students begin to express their understanding orally or in writing based on the observed images. Third, the narrative construction stage, where students compose a narrative text with a beginning-middle-end structure based on the visual understanding transformed into language. This process serves as scaffolding that facilitates the gradual development of writing skills.

Several studies support the effectiveness of this approach. Transmediation from image to text enhances the understanding of narrative structure and cohesion between sentences (Mondolalo & others, 2023). Dual coding theory also explains that the combination of visual and verbal pathways in the learning process strengthens memory, logic, and creativity. The transmediation approach improves student participation in writing activities because it reduces the initial cognitive load, which is often a barrier (Abdillah et al., 2024). When students are given concrete visuals, they feel they have a 'grip' to begin writing, which boosts their confidence and active participation.

Thus, the visual-verbal transmediation approach not only addresses challenges in writing instruction but also opens up new pedagogical opportunities that are more comprehensive and humanistic. It embraces the diversity of students' learning modalities, bridges cognitive gaps, and creates a democratic and collaborative learning space. This model aligns closely with the 21st-century education paradigm, which emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, and self-expression in various forms of representation (Hutasoit, 2021). Therefore, the development of this framework is worth integrating widely into writing curricula across various levels of primary and special education.

CONCLUSION

In writing instruction practices, the presence of image media plays a crucial role, particularly in supporting the thinking process and emotional management of students with special learning needs. Through a transmediation approach that combines visual and verbal elements, images function as more than just a tool; they become a bridge between students' personal experiences and the narrative texts they construct. Research findings show that with the help of image media, students are able to explore and develop ideas more smoothly, build a coherent storyline, and overcome feelings of anxiety or doubt while writing. This makes the use of images not only a creative pedagogical strategy but also one that is responsive to the challenges of contemporary learning.

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