

From Pictures to Written Words: Rethinking English Writing for Young Learners with Autism through Visual Sequencing

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ABSTRACT

Writing in English can be challenging for young learners with autism because they may experience difficulties in generating ideas, recalling vocabulary, organizing events, and constructing sentences. This study explores the use of visual sequencing to support English writing among second-grade elementary school learners with autism. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed. Data were collected through classroom observations, learners' written work, and a semi-structured teacher interview. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to vocabulary use, organization of ideas, sentence construction, learner engagement, and teacher scaffolding. The findings indicate that visual sequencing helped learners connect pictures with English vocabulary and organize events in a logical order. The picture sequences also supported learners in moving from individual words to simple sentences and short texts. In addition, learners demonstrated greater engagement when writing activities were supported by concrete and predictable visual information. However, teacher scaffolding remained necessary, particularly through vocabulary prompts, sentence starters, modeling, and repetition. The study concludes that visual sequencing can serve as an effective scaffold for making English writing more concrete, structured, and accessible for young learners with autism.

Keywords: visual sequencing, English writing, young learners with autism, visual support, teacher scaffolding

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important component of English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, experiences, and information through written language (Abed, 2020; Acar, 2021; Ahram, 2021). However, writing can be challenging for young learners because it requires them to generate ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, organize information, and construct sentences at the same time. For elementary school learners, these demands can become more complex when English is learned as a foreign language (Adi & Ambarini, 2025; Ambarini et al., 2024, 2025; Sumardiyani & Ambarini, 2025, 2026). Therefore, writing instruction for young learners needs to provide concrete and accessible support that corresponds to their developmental and linguistic needs.

These challenges may be more pronounced among young learners with autism. Learners with autism may demonstrate different patterns of communication, attention, language development, and information processing (Al-Hassan, 2024; Almalki, 2021; Almalky, 2023). In English writing activities, they may experience difficulties in generating ideas, recalling vocabulary, organizing events, and transforming their thoughts into sentences (Ambarini, Setyaji, & Zahraini, 2018; Ambarini, Setyaji, et al., 2019; Suciati & Ambarini, 2018). A conventional writing task that begins with a verbal or written prompt may therefore provide insufficient support. Instead, instruction needs to create a clear structure that helps learners understand what they are expected to communicate.

Visual support offers one possible way to make writing more accessible. Pictures provide concrete representations of people, objects, actions, and events that learners can observe and interpret. For learners with autism, visual information can provide additional structure and make abstract language concepts easier to understand (Utami, Ambarini, Utami, et al., 2026; Utami, Zahraini, Ambarini, & Ayu, 2026). In English learning, pictures can also support vocabulary recall and help learners establish connections between meaning and language. However, using individual pictures alone may not be sufficient when learners are expected to organize several ideas into a coherent written text (Alnahdi, 2021; Alsolami, 2022; Anderson, 2023).

Visual sequencing provides a more structured form of picture-based support. In visual sequencing, learners work with a series of pictures arranged according to the order of events. The sequence provides a framework for understanding what happens first, next, and last (Ambarini, 2026a, 2026b; Utami, Ambarini, Zahraini, & Utami, 2026a). Learners can then identify relevant vocabulary, describe individual pictures, and gradually combine their ideas into sentences and short texts. In this way, the writing process can move through a more manageable pathway: pictures → words → sentences → short text.

Although visual materials have been widely used to support language learning, there is still a need to understand how visual sequencing functions specifically within English writing activities for young learners with autism (Utami, Ambarini, Zahraini, & Utami, 2026b, 2026c; Utami, Zahraini, Ambarini, & Ambarini, 2026). Much of the discussion of writing instruction focuses on the final written product, while less attention is given to how learners move from visual information to written language and what types of teacher support are needed during this process (Utami, Zahraini, et al., 2025; A. D. Zahraini et al., 2018; D. A. Zahraini, Utami, Ambarini, et al., 2025; D. A. Zahraini et al., 2026). Examining learners' classroom responses and written products can provide a deeper understanding of how visual sequencing works as a writing scaffold.

This study therefore explores the use of visual sequencing in English writing instruction for

second-grade elementary school learners with autism. It focuses on how learners connect pictures with English vocabulary, organize events, construct simple sentences, and engage in writing activities. The study also examines the role of teacher scaffolding in supporting learners throughout the process.

By examining the movement from pictures to written words, this study aims to contribute to a more inclusive approach to English writing instruction (Ambarini, Ardiana, et al., 2019; Ambarini et al., 2026; Suciati & Ambarini, 2018; A. D. Zahraini et al., 2019; D. A. Zahraini, Utami, & Ambarini, 2025). The findings are expected to provide practical insights for teachers who work with young learners with autism and to demonstrate how visual sequencing can be integrated into classroom writing activities to make written English more concrete, structured, and accessible.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore how visual sequencing supports English writing among second-grade elementary school learners with autism. The study focused on learners' writing processes, difficulties, classroom engagement, and the types of support they needed when transforming visual information into written English.

Participants and Setting

The study involved second-grade elementary school learners with autism who were learning English as a foreign language. The participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in English writing activities. The research was conducted during regular English lessons in an elementary school classroom. To protect the participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three sources: classroom observations, learners' written work, and a semi-structured teacher interview.

Classroom observations focused on learners' responses to the picture sequences, including their ability to identify vocabulary, arrange events, construct sentences, and participate in writing activities. The researcher recorded learners' behaviors, difficulties, and the scaffolding provided by the teacher.

Learners' written work was collected after the visual sequencing activities. The writing samples were examined to identify how learners connected pictures with words, organized events, constructed simple sentences, and communicated meaning.

A semi-structured interview with the English teacher was also conducted to gain further information about the learners' writing abilities, difficulties, engagement, and responses to visual sequencing.

Instructional Procedure

The visual sequencing activities were conducted in several stages. First, learners observed a series of pictures representing a familiar event or daily activity. Second, they identified key objects and actions in the pictures (Amalia et al., 2026; Nurhartanti et al., 2024; Setyaningrum et al., 2026; Syafitri et al., 2026; D. A. Zahraini, Ambarini, Utami, et al., 2025). Third, they arranged the pictures in the correct order. Finally,

they used the sequence to produce simple English sentences or a short text.

Teacher support, such as vocabulary prompts, sentence starters, modeling, repetition, and gestures, was provided according to individual learner needs.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically. Observation notes, interview data, and learners' written work were reviewed and coded to identify recurring patterns. The codes were then grouped into themes related to visual-to-language connections, sequencing, sentence construction, learner engagement, writing difficulties, and teacher scaffolding.

The findings from the three data sources were compared to strengthen the interpretation of the data. This triangulation helped provide a more comprehensive understanding of how visual sequencing supported learners in moving from pictures to written English.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from the school, and informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians (Laveresa et al., 2024). Learners' identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used throughout the study. The activities were conducted as part of supportive classroom learning and did not disadvantage learners who required additional assistance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Visual Sequencing Supported Vocabulary Development

The classroom observations showed that visual sequencing helped learners identify and recall English vocabulary related to familiar objects and actions. The pictures provided a concrete reference before learners were asked to write. Instead of generating vocabulary without support, learners could look at each picture and identify words that represented the people, objects, and actions shown.

Table 1. Learners' Responses during Visual Sequencing Activities

Observation Aspect	Classroom Evidence	Interpretation
Identifying objects	Learners identified objects shown in the pictures	Visuals supported vocabulary recall
Identifying actions	Learners named actions represented in the pictures	Pictures supported understanding of meaning
Selecting vocabulary	Learners selected words related to each picture	cues helped generate writing ideas
Teacher support	Some learners required verbal prompts	Visuals were useful but did not eliminate scaffolding

Source: Classroom observation, [2026

The observation data suggest that visual sequencing provided an accessible entry point into English writing. The learners did not begin with a blank page; instead, the pictures gave them concrete content that could be transformed into English words.

From Pictures to Words and Sentences

The learners' written work showed a gradual movement from identifying vocabulary to constructing simple sentences. After arranging the pictures, learners used the visual sequence to determine what happened in each part of the story.

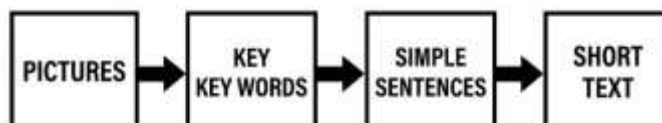
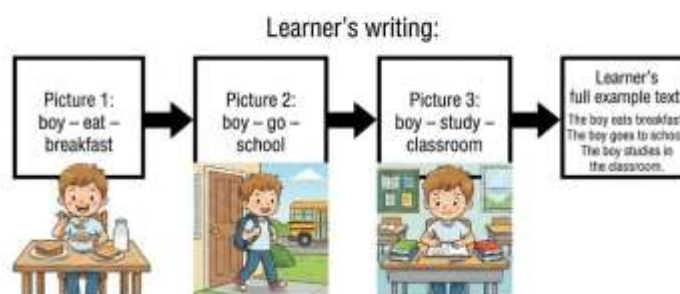


Figure 1. Visual-to-Written Language Process

This process illustrates how visual sequencing functioned as a scaffold (Firdausy et al., 2025; Laveresa et al., 2024; Listianingsih et al., 2023). The pictures first supported meaning-making, while the identified vocabulary became the linguistic material for sentence construction. The sequence then provided an organizational structure for connecting individual sentences.

Extract 1. Example of Learner Writing



"The boy eat breakfast. He go to school. He study in classroom."

Source: Learner's written work, [year]. Pseudonym used.

Although grammatical errors remained, the learner was able to communicate the sequence of events represented in the pictures. This finding indicates that the visual support helped the learner focus on expressing meaning before achieving complete grammatical accuracy.

Visual Sequencing Supported Organization of Ideas

A further finding was that the sequence of pictures helped learners organize events. Learners were able to identify what happened first, next, and last by referring to the visual order. This was particularly useful when they were required to produce more than one sentence.

From Pictures to Written Words:

Rethinking English Writing for Young Learners with Autism through Visual Sequencing

(Utami, et al.)

Table 2. Characteristics of Learners' Written Products

Writing Feature	Evidence from Writing Samples
Vocabulary	Words were generally related to the pictures
Event sequence	Events generally followed the picture order
Sentence structure	Simple subject-verb patterns appeared
Grammar	Errors in tense, articles, and word order remained
Meaning	Main events could generally be understood

Source: *Analysis of learners' written work, [year]*

The findings suggest that visual sequencing provided not only vocabulary support but also an organizational framework. The learners could use the pictures to determine the content and order of their sentences.

Visual Sequencing Increased Engagement in Writing Activities

The observations also indicated that learners were more engaged when writing was preceded by picture-based activities. Learners looked at the pictures, responded to teacher questions, and referred back to the visual sequence when they experienced difficulty.

This pattern suggests that visual sequencing may make writing activities more predictable and less abstract. For young learners with autism, predictability can be particularly useful because the pictures clearly show what needs to be described and in what order.

The teacher's scaffolding remained important throughout the activity. Some learners could move from pictures to sentences with minimal support, while others required vocabulary prompts, sentence starters, modeling, or repetition.

Teacher Scaffolding in the Move from Pictures to Written Words

The teacher interview and classroom observations showed that visual sequencing was most effective when combined with appropriate scaffolding. Teacher support helped learners move from identifying individual words to constructing meaningful sentences.

Table 3. Forms of Teacher Scaffolding

Scaffolding	Purpose
Vocabulary prompts	Help learners recall relevant words
Sentence starters	Support sentence construction
Modeling	Provide examples of English sentences
Repetition	Reinforce vocabulary and sentence patterns
Gestures	Support understanding of actions

Source: *Classroom observation and teacher interview, [year]*

The findings demonstrate that visual sequencing should not be understood as an independent teaching technique. Rather, it works as a scaffold within teacher-guided instruction. The teacher can adjust

From Pictures to Written Words:

Rethinking English Writing for Young Learners with Autism through Visual Sequencing

(Utami, et al.)

the level of support according to each learner's needs and gradually encourage greater independence (Ambarini et al., 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2017; Santoso et al., 2025; Setyaji et al., 2018).

Taken together, the findings demonstrate a gradual pathway from pictures to words, words to sentences, and sentences to short texts. Visual sequencing helped make the writing task more concrete and organized while providing learners with an accessible source of ideas (Alfianto et al., 2020; Ambarini, 2012, 2017; Ambarini, Setyaji, et al., 2019; Ambarini et al., 2021a; Stevani et al., 2023).

The findings therefore suggest that English writing for young learners with autism can be approached as a process of meaning-making rather than simply a test of grammatical accuracy (Ambarini, Setyaji, & Suneki, 2018; Dwi et al., 2024; Nabila & Ambarini, 2024; Prayogo et al., 2021; Putri & Ambarini, 2018; Utami et al., 2022). When learners are given visual support, they have a concrete representation of what they want to communicate before they are required to express it in English.

However, the findings also show that visual sequencing does not remove the need for teacher guidance (Ambarini et al., 2021b; Hasanah et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2022, 2023; Utami, Ambarini, et al., 2025). Instead, its value lies in reducing the initial difficulty of generating and organizing ideas. Combined with appropriate scaffolding, visual sequencing can provide a structured pathway toward more independent written expression.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that visual sequencing can provide meaningful support for English writing among second-grade elementary school learners with autism (Indriyani et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2025). The findings showed that pictures helped learners connect visual information with English vocabulary, organize events, construct simple sentences, and participate more actively in writing activities.

The use of visual sequences also provided a clear and predictable pathway from pictures to words, words to sentences, and sentences to short texts (Dewi et al., 2024; Hamidah et al., 2022; Kumala et al., 2021; D. A. Zahraini et al., 2024c). Although learners still demonstrated difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction, visual support made the writing process more concrete and manageable. Teacher scaffolding remained important in helping learners move from identifying words to producing meaningful sentences.

The findings also highlight the importance of adapting English writing instruction to learners' individual needs (Ambarini et al., 2022; Amellia et al., 2023; Kusumaningrum et al., 2022; Yunita & Sari, 2025; D. A. Zahraini et al., 2024a, 2024b; Zulva et al., 2022). Rather than expecting young learners with autism to immediately produce written texts independently, teachers can provide gradual and structured support through visual materials, modeling, sentence frames, and guided practice. Such an approach allows learners to participate in writing according to their abilities while gradually developing greater confidence and independence.

Therefore, visual sequencing should not be viewed merely as an additional classroom aid, but as a practical scaffold for developing English written expression among young learners with autism. Future research may explore the use of longer picture sequences, different text types, and more independent writing tasks to examine how visual support can gradually be reduced as learners develop greater writing independence.

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From Pictures to Written Words:

Rethinking English Writing for Young Learners with Autism through Visual Sequencing

(Utami, et al.)

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