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The Effects of Picture-Cued Instruction on Improving Fourth Grade Students' Reading Comprehension in English Classes

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Abstract	Article Information
The study examined the effects of picture-cued instruction in improving the reading comprehension of fourth-grade students at Abdisa-Aga Primary School in Fitche. A quasi-experimental research design was employed to achieve the objective. Pre-test and post-test were used to collect relevant data from experimental and control groups. Using a non-random sampling technique, 21 students were placed in the treatment group and 21 in the control group. While the control group attended reading lessons using a conventional way, the treatment group maintained through picture-cued procedures. A post-test was then used to confirm the study's findings. The intervention process ended in 9 weeks. The collected data were analyzed through an independent samples t-test in SPSS version 22. The result demonstrated that picture-cued education significantly improved students' reading comprehension. The reading comprehension test scores of fourth-grade students showed a statistically significant rise from the pre-test (M = 8.19, SD = 3.94) to the post-test (M = 11.04, SD = 5.42), t (20) = -7.071, p < .05 (two-tailed). The post-test score increased by an average of 2.85 with a 95% confidence interval. To enhance students' reading comprehension, picture-cued reading instruction should be used on a regular basis.	

INTRODUCTION

The English language has an academic role in Ethiopia; it serves as a medium of instruction in both lower-level and higher institutions. The English language has academic significance in Ethiopia; it serves as a medium of teaching both in lower-level and higher institutions (Early Grade Reading Assessment [EGRA], 2014). Teaching materials are prepared and delivered for students of various levels in the English language. Thus, students are expected to utilize the English language to carryout effective communication and to succeed academically (MoE, 2008; National Agency for Examinations [NAE], 2010). Among

the important English language abilities that are essential to students' academic achievement is reading (Watkins, 2018). The ability to comprehend written content, assess it, and apply it to one's purpose is the crucial goal of reading (Williams, 2005; Yang et al., 2018; Fitsum, 2020).

To secure this, a reading instruction must fit with the student's reading comprehension. A text drawn from students' background and culture can possibly help them with comprehension (Richards, 2005). A text that is out of the student's context and difficult to understand may make the activity of reading tedious (Harmer, 2007; Nation, 2009). If

students read relevant, accessible, enjoyable, and stimulating texts, they can have a better understanding of a text. To improve students' reading comprehension, teaching materials should incorporate stimulating, relevant, and visualized texts drawn from students' background knowledge and culture (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

The social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) announces that learning to read can be affected by personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Therefore, modeling is the best way of improving reading comprehension. The reader may be inspired to learn how to carry out a new behavior while reading, which is supported by seeing models or images. To build a text's overall meaning is to understand it (Larasati & Yuni, 2018). When readers apply their prior knowledge to interpret and assess a text's content, engage with it, comprehend its meaning, analyze it, and then use it for their own purposes, they are able to understand the text's general meaning (Yang & Wilson, 2006). According to the cognitivist theory, experience and reason are used to understand, negotiate, and reach consensus on the world and reality. Students' schemata should be activated through meaningful reading practice in order to achieve comprehension. Successful reading comprehension is facilitated by activated schemata (Mori, 2002).

In addition, the socio-cultural theory adheres to the idea that reading is a social practice. To comprehend the general meaning of a text, a reader has to interact with a text (Li et al., 2022). Thus, a reader vigorously interacts with the text and decodes and uses the skills of language to discover the general meaning of a text. A reader is a text participant who interacts with text to determine the meaning of a text. As an analyst, a reader uses schemata that aid in understanding and determining the writer's intention. From this point on, a reader turns into a text user and reads a text for a purpose. This suggests that the reader's interaction with a text is what leads to understanding an overall message (Larasati & Yuni, 2018). Reading any content for any purpose would be tedious if students did not act and share their experiences. Readers may be highly motivated to read in order to recognize the text's

content and deduce its meaning, which leads to reading comprehension (Kao, 2010).

So, there should be a need to design effective ways of reading instruction, like picture-cued instruction (Nasir, 2020). Picture cues can be used to awaken learners' prior knowledge and interpretive skills of reading. It comprises objects, photos, and the relationship between objects in a reading text (Rae, 2018). Hence, it can help learners to guess the relationship between the objects, and this may lead them to construct a general meaning of a text. Students can bring their prior experience of a cue-picture to the reading text to easily reach the meaning. It provides cue answers and inferences and comforts them to gain the contents and to present and check meanings; students will look at the picture to predict the content and get into what is coming next (Aukerman & Chambers, 2016).

Additionally, active engagement between the reader and the text is necessary for reading comprehension (Ahmadi, 2013). Students' ability to make meaning can be enhanced by instructional strategies like picture cues. Being visually appealing, picture cues can draw in children and help them become more fluent and motivated readers. They also offer cultural information, which can encourage kids to read. This could make the educational environment more engaging. Because picture cues offer sequences of events that are connected to one another, they can assist students in organizing the storyline of a story. Reading motivation can be increased by interaction, which enhances reading comprehension. Students can readily learn about objects, activities, events, and relationships via picture clues. According to Rae (2018) and Nasir (2020), an image that provides background and cultural information can guarantee reading ease, stimulation, and the capacity to deduce a text's overall meaning. Thus, it is possible to awaken students' schemata. Reading comprehension is, therefore, impacted by an awakened schema.

Thus, in order to enhance fourth-grade students' reading comprehension, the goal of this study was to add to the existing literature by investigating a research-based approach of picture-cued reading

instruction. The findings of this study may aid educators and curriculum designers in developing, organizing, and executing picture-cued teaching strategies in reading classrooms.

Statement of the problem

Reading comprehension constitutes a crucial skill for students to succeed academically. Despite the fact that reading comprehension is essential for academic achievement, the majority of elementary school students are not effective readers who cannot understand a text (Yenus, 2018; Early Grade Reading Assessment [EGRA], 2014). Due to their inability to deduce and connect the text to their prior knowledge to understand the overall message, the majority of students struggle with reading comprehension and receive lower scores (Early Grade Reading Interventions in Ethiopia [EGRIE], 2016). Besides, informal assessments conducted by the researcher show that grade four students of Abdisa-Aga Primary School exhibited difficulty in reading comprehension. They were caught influent, less motivated to read, and unable to comprehend a message. They lack the skill of relating their prior knowledge to a text. They are not able to make inferences and use the text for their purpose. They further suffer from the problem of analyzing and interpreting a text. An English teacher of the study area informally revealed that the English textbook in use was incompatible with ensuring reading comprehension.

Research has been conducted to improve students' reading comprehension. Nasir (2020) reported that grade nine students' reading comprehension was improved by the picture-cued methods. Rae (2018) conducted mixed-methods research and examined students' performance in answering 'Wh' questions and found that the ability of students with autism spectrum disorder to correctly answer 'Wh' questions is increased after the reading lesson was intervened with the picture-cued methods. Research done in Ethiopia depicted that the majority of elementary School students showed low performance in reading comprehension. Enyew et al. (2015) depicted that fourth-grade students were found incapable of comprehending reading texts because of a lack of knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, a lack of prior experience with the topic, and a negative attitude towards reading skills. The researchers revealed that teachers' scaffolding can positively affect students' reading comprehension.

Nevertheless, the above national and international studies are different from the current study. The international studies were conducted in universities, and the experiment was carried out within four weeks. One of the international studies also surveyed the use of picture cues in answering Wh-questions. The current research is far different from the international studies. It is carried out in the primary school in the Ethiopian context. Besides, the experiment was carried out for nine weeks. To the best of the researcher's experience, picture-cued reading instruction, which is found to be an effective way to improve primary grade students' reading comprehension, has not been studied in the Ethiopian context. Picture-cued instruction can be a powerful tool in enhancing reading comprehension, especially for young learners. Research on picture-cued instruction is particularly suitable for fourth-grade students, as this age group is at a critical stage of developing reading skills. Local studies tried to handle students' difficulty of reading comprehension via the support of strategy training, teachers' scaffolding, and teaching the phases of reading. As far as the researcher is aware, no research has looked at how picture-cued education affects students' reading comprehension in Ethiopian primary schools. The researcher then accepted the necessity of conducting a study on how picture-cued education affects fourth-grade students' reading comprehension.

Research questions

1. What effect does picture-cued instruction have on grade four students' reading comprehension compared to conventional reading instruction?
2. How does picture-cued instruction improve grade four students' reading comprehension scores?

3. Is there a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension results between experimental and control group students?

Theoretical Framework

Reading comprehension is the process of understanding the meaning of a text. When readers employ a variety of reading strategies, engage with the text, comprehend its meaning, apply prior knowledge to interpret and assess the text, analyze the text, and then use it for their intended purpose, they are said to have comprehended the text (Yang et.al., 2018). The current study is founded on various theories of reading in framing the study and analyzing the results. Reading comprehension needs students' effective use of reading strategies. The socio-cultural theory is adherent to learning to read. Readers are exposed to interaction; the reader interacts with the text. The process of teaching reading roots in making the learners active meaning-makers and problem-solvers in the class (Yang & Wilson, 2006). It advocates the relationship and interaction between the reader and the text. Reading comprehension is a social practice by which the reader actively participates and engages with others for social purposes.

The socio-cultural theory views reading as a social practice of code breaking, participation with text, social uses of text, and analysis of the text (Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, various processes that support students' reading comprehension come from instructional practices such as graphic organizers and picture cues. To secure this, teachers are supposed to show students how to use what they read and what they know to make meaning (Yang & Wilson, 2006). Hereafter, picture-cue is the best method used to improve students' access to the text and the effectiveness of the interaction between the reader and text, in turn promoting meaning-making. Pursuing students' reading comprehension, picture cues are brought by the teachers as learning media to support and give help to the process of reading. Pictures are interesting to see; they are able to attract students, so the students are more motivated to read. Picture cues provide cultural information;

following this, students can be stimulated to read. The socio-cultural theory advocates that picture cues can increase readers' motivation because they can make the situation of the classroom more interesting (Kao, 2010).

Furthermore, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) realizes that learning to read can be influenced by a person's environment and the things around them. Successful reading comes into existence within the personal, behavioral, and environmental influences, which means that the majority of human behaviors are learned through observation and modeling. Observing pictures, graphics, images, and objects can dully help an individual develop an understanding of how to perform a new behavior. Information gained through observing models or pictures can act as a guide for the individual when they perform the new behavior. Any new experiences a person has are compared or evaluated against their past experiences. The social cognitive theory asserts that students' thinking, motivation, beliefs, and feelings about something affect their behavior during reading. Regarding this, picture cues are important tools used to help students' understanding of meaning. It can easily inform the students about the object; pictures provide information, including objects, actions, events, and relationships; language teachers can present pictures from students' cultural and background knowledge (Harmer, 2007; Larasati & Yuni, 2018). A picture-cue showing cultural and background information can assure ease of learning to read, stimulation of reading, and the ability to infer the meaning of a reading text.

At all, picture-cued instruction can improve students' reading comprehension; an easily informative picture improves students' interest in reading. An interested, stimulated, and strategy-using reader can be motivated to read; a motivated reader can improve his/her reading comprehension. Hereafter, fourth-grade students are expected to learn reading skills in a way that improves their reading comprehension. Reading comprehension plays a key role in the academic success of fourth-grade students. Hence, students' reading comprehension was intervened via a picture-cued

instruction, and this would hopefully improve their reading comprehension. Based on the above theories, the current research tried to examine the effects of picture-cued instruction on improving grade four students' reading comprehension.

Conceptual Framework

The current study's conceptual framework in Figure 1 comprises the picture-cued instruction as the independent variable, whereas reading comprehension of grade four students is the dependent variable. Grade four students' reading comprehension was checked through pre- and post-tests. These variables are found to be very important to understand how picture-cued instruction affects reading comprehension. Figure 1 shows the diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework of the current study:
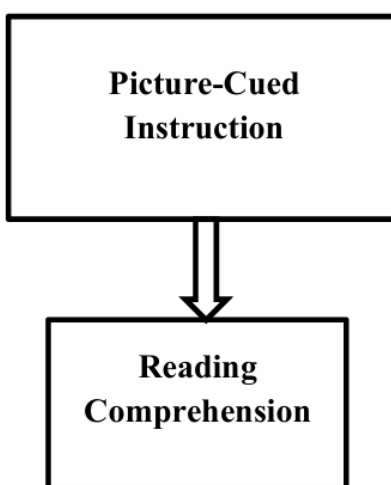

Figure 1. *Conceptual framework of the study*

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

In order to get objective, impartial, pertinent, and reliable results in classroom settings, the current study used a quasi-experimental research design with two groups (Dörnyei, 2007; Kothari, 2004 & Creswell, 2014). Pre- and post-reading comprehension tests were administered to the study participants, who were divided into experimental and control groups. The picture-cued module was used to instruct 21 students in the experimental group, whereas the conventional (ongoing) approach was used for the remaining 21 students in the control class. Additionally, within nine (9) weeks, a number of picture-cued practice sessions were held. For nine weeks, the students in the control group received reading instruction from texts that had no pictures. Exercises were then monitored and evaluated using a series of post-tests following the training. Following this, a reading comprehension test was administered to every student in the control and experimental groups. To do so, the researcher got a legal consent from the school to conduct the study; then, they gave a pre-test to all the students. After the pre-test had given, the researcher started giving the training on the picture-cued reading instruction for the experimental group students. The researcher prepared a picture-cued reading instruction training manual that was covered in 16 hours. The materials given to the experimental group students were color-printed texts supported by pictures, illustrations, icons, and images to ensure attractiveness, ease, interest, and motivation of reading. During the instruction, practical picture-cued reading instruction supported by the researcher's reflection and feedback was considered to teach the selected class. Reading instruction using the conventional/ongoing method was given

to the control group students. The reading texts without pictures were given to the control group students for nine weeks. Lastly, both groups of students' reading comprehension scores were checked by a post-test. The current study's

researcher was able to obtain sufficient and reliable data based on a quasi-experimental design. The research design is outlined below in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1

Research design

Groups	Pre-test	Intervention	Post-test
Experimental	Test 1	√	Test 2
Control	Test 1	º	Test 2

Study Participants

The study participants were Grade 4 students at Abdisa Aga Primary School in Fitche during the 2025 academic year. Out of the 42 students who were chosen, 21 were allocated to the experimental group and 21 to the control group through non-random sampling techniques. 42 students in all, 21 in each group, participated in this study. Furthermore, picture-cued reading instruction, which has been shown to be an effective means of enhancing grade four students' reading comprehension, has not been investigated in our setting. For young students in particular, picture-cued education can be a very effective way to improve reading comprehension. Students in the fourth grade are especially well-suited for research on picture-cued instruction because they are at a crucial point in their reading development.

Data Collection Instruments

A reading comprehension test was used to collect relevant data. Students' scores on reading comprehension tests were examined in the pre-test session. The participants were then divided into two groups by the researcher: the treatment group, picture-cued reading instruction, and the control group, conventional/ongoing instruction. In addition, the researcher used a post-test to verify the findings from the study. ELT teachers assessed the reading comprehension exercises' validity using the predetermined standards. Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to calculate the

reliability of the reading comprehension pre- and post-tests. Two raters scored the tests, which were given to forty-two students. For the pre-test and post-test, the inter-rater reliability is $r = .92$ and $r = .89$, respectively.

Procedures

To test or experiment on the impact of picture-cued instruction in improving fourth-graders' reading comprehension, the researchers of the study prepared a material for intervention. Thus, picture-cued instruction was utilized to provide reading lessons for the experimental group students of Abdisa-Aga Primary School. The students in the experimental group received picture-cued reading instruction exclusively, while the students in the control group received instruction using the conventional/ongoing teaching method. The content of the material was prepared in the same way for both groups. A range of activities employed in the teaching material of the experimental group included picture-cued reading comprehension. But text without a picture was used for the control group students. Likewise, the materials were edited by two English language instructors of Salale University. Besides, a great emphasis was placed on fitting the material to students' skills. Words, contents, phrases, and activities used were fitting to the MoE (2022) English for Ethiopia Grade 4 Student Book.

Students' scores on reading comprehension tests were examined in the pre-test session. Then, the researcher divided the population into two

groups and provided reading lessons via the picture-cued method for the treatment class and via the conventional/skill-based methods for the control group. Next to this, the researcher checked the results gained after the study via the application of a post-test. The intervention ended within nine weeks.

Data Analysis

Relevant data was collected via reading comprehension tests. The quantitative data were organized and analyzed systematically by the application of descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS, 2022. The data was checked for its

normal distribution, and it was found to be normally distributed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
   Results

The study's objective was to investigate the effects of picture-cued instruction on the reading comprehension of fourth-grade EFL students. Reading comprehension tests were used in the study to gather pertinent data. The quantitative data were organized and analyzed systematically by the application of descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS, 2022. The following is the presentation of the examined data:

Table 2

Independent samples t-test result of pre-test scores

Group	No.	Mean	Sta. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	21	8.19	3.94	.000	40	.956
Control	21	8.19	3.99			

The pre-test scores of the students in the control group and the treatment group were compared using the independent samples t-test in Table 2. The experimental group's score (M = 8.19, SD = 3.94) is comparable to the control group's (M = 8.19, SD = 3.99). Nevertheless, the independent sample t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the two groups' reading comprehension

test mean scores (t =.000, df = 40, p =.956 >.05) in the pre-test. Prior to the intervention, there was no significant difference between the two groups' reading comprehension scores (p =.956 >.05). Therefore, to verify this, the independent sample t-test of the post-test was calculated using SPSS 22, as Table 3 below illustrates.

Table 3

Independent samples t-test result of post-test scores

Group	No.	Mean	Sta. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	21	11.04	5.42	1.74	40	.000
Control	21	8.57	3.58			

The treatment group and control group students' post-test results following the intervention were compared using an independent samples t-test in Table 3 to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference. It is evident that the reading comprehension test scores of the

students in the treatment group increased statistically significantly from the pre-test (M = 8.19, SD = 3.94) into post-test (M = 11.04, SD = 5.42), t (20) = -7.071, p <.05 (two tailed) compared to the students in the control group from the pre-test mean score (M = 8.19, SD = 3.99) to the post-test

result (M = 8.57, SD = 3.58). Additionally, the mean increase in the post-test reading comprehension score for the students in the treatment group was 2.85 with a 95% confidence interval. After that, the alternative hypothesis one (1—hypothesis one) was kept, and the null hypothesis was rejected. The aforementioned result clearly depicted that picture-cued instruction was successful in improving grade four students' reading comprehension. In sum, the experimental intervention worked better than the ongoing procedures in the study area.

Discussions

The study's primary goal was to examine how picture-cued training affected the reading comprehension of fourth graders. Analysis of the study question revealed that picture-cued instruction increased the reading comprehension scores of the students in the treatment group. According to the analysis, picture-cued reading could help participants improve their reading comprehension and provide them with enough knowledge to draw conclusions, understand meaning, and acquire vocabulary. Thus, picture-cued instruction would help them become more proficient readers and meet academic requirements. Similarly, research by Nasir (2020) found that teaching second-year university students using picture-cue strategies significantly enhanced their reading comprehension. The researcher discovered that the experimental group's reading comprehension scores had improved considerably from the pre-test (63.21%) to the post-test (92.75%).

Picture-cued-instruction serves as a learning tool in the study area to aid and assist the reading instruction process. When students are reading, picture cues can not only inspire them but also show and teach them. All things considered, picture-cued education helped the students improve their reading comprehension. According to various research (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rae, 2018; Aukerman & Chambers, 2016), picture-cued reading instruction can be utilized to awaken

readers' prior knowledge and reading interpretation skills.

The attained finding aligns with the current study's alternate hypothesis. The researcher's initial hypothesis was that the reading comprehension scores of fourth-grade students at Fitche, Abdisa Aga Primary School, were significantly correlated with picture-cued instruction. The study's results fully support the aforementioned concept. Students' reading comprehension appears to have improved as a result of picture-cued training. The aforementioned outcome can act as a springboard for language instructors looking for efficient ways to teach reading in order to improve their students' reading comprehension.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there was an effect of picture-cued training in enhancing fourth-graders' reading comprehension in the study area. A statistically significant increase was exhibited in the grade four students' reading comprehension test scores from the pre-test (M = 8.28, SD = 4.06) to the post-test result (M = 11.04, SD = 5.42), t (20) = -7.071, p < .05 (two-tailed). Besides, the mean increase in the post-test reading comprehension score was 2.85 with a 95% confidence interval. In order to promote and facilitate the teaching and learning process, images are typically employed as learning material. During a learning process, pictures can not only inspire students but also show and teach them. Pictures are visually appealing and can increase students' motivation to learn more. Additionally, photographs are engaging because they might convey cultural information. The result of the study can serve as a stepping stone for language instructors and researchers to effectively practice and research efficient ways to teach reading in order to improve students' reading comprehension. Moreover, picture-cued reading instruction has positive effects on the students' reading comprehension.

Recommendations

Picture-cued instruction improves students' reading comprehension, as demonstrated by significant

score increases in this study. Therefore, picture-cued instruction should be routinely implemented in grade four to improve students' reading comprehension. The conclusion showed how picture-cued training can enhance the reading comprehension of fourth-graders. As a result, picture-cued reading teaching should be used frequently in elementary schools since it has been shown to improve fourth-grade students' reading and comprehension skills. The abilities required to implement picture-cued reading teaching must be acquired by EFL teachers. When developing textbooks and supplemental materials for elementary school children, curriculum planners and material developers should take picture-cued reading texts into account.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Yonas Tamiru: Data Collection, Conceptualization, Analysis & Writing Original Draft. **Wondimu Tegegn:** Supervision, Data Analysis & Model Validation, Review & Editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Ambo University before data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Availability

The data generated and interpreted during this research are accessible from the authors upon a convincing request.

Acknowledgments

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