IMPROVING STUDENTS' FREE VERSE WRITING SKILLS: A STUDY OF THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL IN INDONESIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract
The ability to write free verse poetry among junior high school students remains relatively low due to the limited variety of instructional models that can stimulate creativity and meaningful learning experiences. This condition indicates the urgency of applying more active and contextual learning models. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the experiential learning model assisted by picture media in improving the free verse writing skills of eighth-grade students at SMPN Satu Atap Cikawao, Sumedang. The research employed a pretest–posttest control group design by comparing the learning outcomes of the experimental and control groups.The results show that the experimental group experienced a more significant improvement than the control group. The writing scores of students in the experimental group increased from 5.6435 to 7.7739 (an improvement of 2.1304), whereas the control group increased from 5.4533 to 7.0200 (an improvement of 1.5667). In addition, students responded positively to the use of picture media as a stimulus for creativity. These findings confirm that the experiential learning model assisted by picture media is effective in enhancing skills for writing free verse poetry.This study contributes to enriching instructional strategies in Indonesian language learning, particularly in developing creative writing skills. Further studies are recommended to apply this model at different grade levels or school contexts and to examine the integration of other visual media to obtain more comprehensive results.

Keywords: *experiential learning; free verse writing skills; picture media*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to express thoughts in written form is a crucial component of communication and Indonesian language learning. Strong writing skills require a broad vocabulary, the ability to generate ideas, and the ability to organize those ideas into a logical written structure. In becoming proficient writers, Tarigan emphasizes the importance of consistent and diligent practice. However, creative writing such as poetry poses a unique challenge for many students (H.G., 2013). The process of expressing one's thoughts and ideas in written form so that they can be understood by readers is what Gie refers to when he states that "writing has the same meaning as composing" (Nafi'ah, 2018). Sukma et al. (2025) quote Maybury, who states that creative writing offers students opportunities to express their feelings, thoughts, and imaginations in written form (Sukma et al., 2025). Poetry is an important part of the Indonesian language curriculum for junior high school (SMP/MTs) students because it helps them read better and learn more about

literature. Challenges in teaching poetry include variations in student ability levels, ineffective pedagogical practices, and difficulties in selecting poetry texts that meet students' individual needs.

Students often struggle with writing free verse poetry because they locate it difficult to generate ideas, choose appropriate diction, and integrate essential poetic elements. Bawamenewi's (2018) study indicates that the application of the inquiry method significantly improves junior high school students' ability to write free verse poetry because the method stimulates motivation and allows students to discover ideas independently (Bawamenewi, 2018). The success or failure of this effort depends on teachers' decisions, particularly in choosing effective teaching strategies that foster engaging and meaningful learning experiences. Likewise, teaching poetry writing requires educators to think critically about instructional models or strategies that can inspire students to write more especially in creating poetry.

Experiential learning, which emphasizes active learning through direct experience, is one paradigm that can support poetry writing instruction. According to Ilham Abu, this strategy facilitates experiential learning, helping students acquire new competencies and perspectives in writing (Abu I, 2023). Setiyani (2020) states that one of the primary functions of the experiential learning approach is to help students refine their poetry writing skills through practice and direct participation. By using this approach, students can take an active role in their learning, making the poetry writing process more engaging and relevant (Setiyani, 2020). In addition, to support a more creative learning process, instructional media play an essential role in encouraging children to think interactively and use their imagination.

The use of visual media such as pictures serves as a powerful tool in learning. Images can help students form more concrete ideas and facilitate the poetry-writing process. A study by Parantean, et al., (2022), for example, found that the use of picture media significantly improved eighth-grade students' poetry writing skills, particularly in the aspects of imagery and diction, because students could more easily connect visuals with poetic concepts Parantean, et al., (2022).

Prior research on the implementation of experiential learning and the utilization of visual media in Indonesian language instruction has predominantly yielded favorable outcomes, although their applicability remains constrained. For example, La Asmin, Mazhud, and Akidah (2024) demonstrated that experiential learning can enhance poetry writing ability (Nurtisari La Asmin, Nurfathana Mazhud, 2024), while (Tamphu, 2024) found that picture media help students build imagination and improve poetic quality Parantean, et al., (2022). However, most of these studies highlight overall learning improvement and do not specifically examine free verse writing skills among junior high school students. Furthermore, visual media in previous studies were often used only as supplementary tools, not as core components of a structured instructional model.

Recognizing these limitations, the present study was designed to narrow these gaps by integrating the experiential learning model and picture media as key components in teaching free verse poetry. This approach differs from previous research, such as that by Nurhikmah, 2024 which positioned images merely as additional tools (Rachel Yoan Siahaan, Tiarma Nova Intan Malasari, 2025). This study introduces a novel approach by emphasizing diction, imagery, message, and creativity in students' free verse poetry, creating a synthesis between structured experiential learning and intentional visual stimulation. This contributes to the advancement of innovative literary teaching strategies in educational institutions. The limited literature on the integration of these techniques in

resource-constrained educational environments—such as SMPN Satu Atap Cikawao—represents a significant gap. This study introduces a new approach by using visuals as primary stimuli throughout all stages of experiential learning. Thus, students perceive images not merely as supplementary resources but as catalysts that stimulate emotions, creativity, and imagination. This research is essential because it presents a contextual, individualized, and student-responsive method for teaching free verse writing. Students at SMPN Satu Atap Cikawao often struggle with writing poetry; therefore, this study implements experiential learning techniques that use imagery to help them overcome these challenges. The implementation of this strategy is expected to enhance students' imagination and motivation in poetry writing, leading to clearer expressive ability and improved writing skills (Ardana et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW
Poetry Writing Skills
Skill refers to the ability to perform tasks proficiently. In the field of language learning, competencies include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing, as a language skill, enables individuals to communicate messages indirectly through written language (Zainurrahman, 2011). Iskandarwassid and Sunendar emphasize that writing is the final linguistic skill that must be mastered after listening, speaking, and reading (Iskandarwassid, 2022). According to Tarigan, writing is a productive and expressive activity used to communicate with others.

Writing poetry is a subskill of writing that functions as a form of self-expression through literary art. Poetry integrates repetition, rhyme, rhythm, and musicality to express the poet's experiences and emotions. Waluyo explains that poetry has distinctive characteristics, including word repetition that produces rhythm (Muliati, 2017). Nurjamin states that poetry is the internalization of experience conveyed through concise and meaningful language. Writing poetry at the junior high school level does not require students to become poets; rather, it serves as an effective means of improving students' creativity and language proficiency (Asep Nurjamin, 2020).

The poetry-writing curriculum for Grade VIII students aims to improve their ability to express ideas and emotions in written form. According to the 2013 Curriculum and the SMPN Satu Atap Cikawao syllabus, poetry instruction includes the introduction of poetry, its elements, and the steps for writing poetry. Kosasih defines poetry as a literary work that uses beautiful and meaningful language. Students are also taught to identify themes, select appropriate diction, and understand the figurative language used in poetry (Kosasih, 2012).

Elements of Poetry
There are two main components of poetry: material and immaterial. The immaterial components include theme, emotion, tone, atmosphere, message, and setting; the material components include typography, imagery, diction, and word choice. Lusi (2012), citing Hidayati, states that both components are interrelated. Emotion expresses the poet's perspective on the theme, which is the central issue of the poem. Meaning is conveyed through tone, which reflects the poet's attitude toward the reader.

Steps in Writing Poetry
The process of writing poetry begins with determining a theme, internalizing the intended message, and selecting appropriate vocabulary. Zulela recommends steps in

poetry writing such as choosing a theme, expressing the message through precise word choices, paying attention to tone and sound, and expressing ideas carefully (Zulela, 2019). Suyatno adds that after determining an idea, the next step is choosing words that carry deep meaning and are consistent with the emotions the writer wishes to express (Suyatno, 2018).

Purpose of Writing Poetry
Writing poetry offers several benefits, such as fostering imagination, broadening students' knowledge of the world, and increasing their self-esteem. Through poetry, students can articulate their thoughts, emotions, and life experiences (Maulidah, 2020). Students can also develop ideas and personal character through the process of composing poetry, which is a form of creative writing that utilizes meaningful word arrangements.

Experiential Learning Model
Learning within the experiential learning paradigm is grounded in practical experience. Faturrohman (Muhammad, 2017) emphasizes that this type of learning bridges the gap between practice and reflection, enabling students to acquire knowledge and skills through practical application. The experiential learning approach consists of four stages: exposure to real-world experiences, reflection on those experiences, the development of abstract ideas, and finally, active experimentation. The first stage includes activities that stimulate students' learning. The second stage involves critically contemplating what has been learned. In the third stage, students conceptualize their experiences in the form of theories, and in the fourth stage, they apply these theories to real-life contexts (Pamungkas & Widiastuti, 2019).

How to Use the Experiential Learning Model
According to Yayuk, the steps in the experiential learning model begin with providing stimuli that lead to real experiences, followed by reflection on those experiences (Hariri & Yayuk, 2014). In the conceptualization stage, students connect their experiences with relevant theories, and in the active experimentation stage, they test these theories through practice. This model supports meaningful learning by providing students with the opportunity to link theory to practice.

Picture Media in Learning
Students gain significant benefits from visual media because such media provide concrete examples of learning material. The advantages of visual media include their realism and their ability to transcend geographical and temporal limitations (Fitri, 2023). Images have the power to simplify complex concepts and stimulate student interest in learning. Therefore, depending on students' developmental stages and the learning material, visual aids should be utilized to enhance learning effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHODS
This study employed a quantitative method with a quasi-experimental design, specifically a static group pretest–posttest design, to determine the variables of interest. The research examined two variables: X, the ability to produce free-verse poetry, and Y, the experiential learning model assisted by picture media. Both an experimental group and a control group were involved in the study. Although the treatment for both groups differed, the tests administered to them were identical (pretest and posttest). A total of 54

eighth-grade students from the 2025–2026 academic year at SMPN Satu Atap Cikawao in Pamulihan District, Sumedang Regency, constituted the research population. Because of the small size, this study employed a census sampling method, meaning the entire population was used as the sample. Classes VIII A and VIII B were randomly selected from two groups of thirty and twenty-four students, respectively, to serve as the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was assigned to Class VIII A, and the control group to Class VIII B.

The instruments used in this research included an observation sheet to assess the implementation of the experiential learning model with picture media, a written test to measure free-verse poetry writing ability, and a questionnaire sheet for data collection. The test consisted of a performance task requiring students to compose free-verse poetry based on a picture provided. In addition, data processing techniques included normality tests, homogeneity tests, and normalized gain analysis to measure the improvement in students' poetry writing ability.

To ensure the validity of the results, data analysis was carried out in stages beginning with normality and homogeneity tests. The study proceeded with statistical analysis using a t-test after the results of the normality and homogeneity tests were confirmed. Based on the t-test method as proposed by McMillan and Schumacher, it is first necessary to ensure that the normalized gain data are homogeneous and normally distributed (McMillan, J.H. and Schumacher, 2001). Then the null hypothesis (H_0) was formulated, stating that Grade VIII students of SMPN Satu Atap Cikawao using the experiential learning model with instructional media do not show greater improvement in free-verse poetry writing ability compared to Grade VIII students not using that model, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated the opposite. The t-test was computed using the Analyze → Compare Means → Independent Samples T-Test option in SPSS version 25.0. H_0 is accepted if the significance value (Sig) is greater than or equal to 0.05 and rejected if Sig is less than 0.05; the decision criterion is based on this significance value. In the final step, conclusions were drawn from the analysis results, especially if the p-value is less than 0.05 (Sundayana, 2020). A p-value below 0.05 indicates that the two groups enhanced their free-verse poetry writing skills in significantly different ways.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that the two groups, each receiving different treatments, experienced different levels of development in their poetry-writing abilities. Based on the pretest results, both groups started the study with comparable skill levels, placing them in an equal position at the beginning of the learning process. Subsequently, while the experimental group learned through an experiential learning approach assisted by picture media, the control group received instruction in the form of lectures without any visual aids. In the control class, the learning process included introductory activities such as greetings, attendance checking, and an explanation of poetry-writing material. Afterward, the teacher administered the pretest and proceeded with lessons on the definition and elements of poetry. Students then engaged in group discussions using the provided poetry examples and completed the posttest with the theme "The Beauty of Nature." Based on the posttest results, most students showed only minimal improvement, with only a few achieving high-category scores. One student even showed a decline in poetry-writing ability. The normalized gain score for this group was 0.3407 with a standard deviation of 0.19348, indicating that the improvement was not substantial.

In contrast, the experimental class facilitated more interactive learning through experiential activities reinforced by picture media. Following the introductory activities, students received pictures for observation and analysis. They then discussed the meaning of the images, related them to their personal experiences, and wrote poems based on the interpretations and imagination stimulated by the visual cues. Students later presented their poems and conducted revisions based on peer feedback. Through these activities, students' poetry-writing skills developed more optimally. This outcome is reflected in the normalized gain score of 0.4870 with a standard deviation of 0.20897, demonstrating greater improvement than the control group.

Analysis of the posttest results further supports these findings. One example of student work is a poem titled *"Surgaku"* by Nani Suryani, which received a high score. The poem met nearly all assessment criteria, such as originality of ideas, structure, message, and diction accuracy. Although a few weaknesses were found regarding figurative language and imagery, the poem still demonstrated strong expressive ability and higher creativity compared to the writing samples from the control class.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the highest scores, lowest scores, means, and standard deviations from both the experimental and control groups in the pretest and posttest assessments of poetry-writing skills.

Table 1

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Statistical Data for

Poetry-Writing Skills in the Control and Experimental Groups					
Statistical Data					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control Pretest	15	4.70	6.30	5.4533	.50690
Control Posttest	15	5.30	8.70	7.0200	.90174
Experimental Pretest	23	4.00	6.70	5.6435	.85164
Experimental Posttest	23	6.30	9.30	7.7739	.89657

Table 1 shows a comparison of the control group and experimental group scores before and after the intervention. With an average pretest score of 5.4533 and a posttest score of 7.0200, the poetry-writing ability of the control group increased significantly. In other words, the control group experienced an average score increase of 1.5667 points. Meanwhile, the experimental group's pretest and posttest average scores were 5.6435 and 7.7739, respectively. This indicates that the experimental group's average score increased by 2.1304 points. Thus, there is a difference of 0.5637 points in the mean increase between the two groups.

Analysis of the t-Test Results for Improvement in Poetry-Writing Skills in the Control and Experimental Classes at SMPN Satu Atap Cikawao

The number of individuals (N), mean scores (M), and standard deviations (SD) were included in the descriptive statistical analysis of the normalized gain (gain score) for poetry-writing skills in both the experimental and control groups.

According to the gain score statistics, the control class had an average normalized gain (GT) score of 0.3407, a standard deviation of 0.19348, and a total of 15 students. The experimental class had a sample size of 23 students, with an average GT score of 0.4870 and a standard deviation of 0.20897. A t-test was then used to determine whether the

experimental and control groups showed different improvements in poetry-writing skills. A summary of the t-test results for the gain score difference is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of the t-test of Differences In Scores For Improving Poetry Writing Skills in the control class and the experimental class

		Levence's Test for Equality of Variences		t-Test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence of Defference	
		F	six	t	df	Sig (2-talled)	Mean Defference	Std. Error Defference	lower	Upper
G T	Equal Variances Assumed	.180	.674	-2.170	36	.037	-.14629	.06740	-.28298	-.00960
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-2.207	31.721	.035	-.14629	.06629	-.28136	-.01122

Table 2 shows that the homogeneity of the normalized gain (Levene's Test for Equality of Variances) has a significance value of 0.674, which is greater than $\alpha = 0.05$. This indicates that the data distribution is homogeneous, allowing the independent samples t-test to be conducted. The p-value obtained is less than 0.05 ($p = 0.037 < 0.05$), indicating a significance value of 0.037. Therefore, the results of the t-test show that H_0 is REJECTED and H_1 is ACCEPTED, meaning that there is a significant difference in the improvement of poetry-writing skills between the control and experimental groups. The experiential learning model assisted by picture media proved to be more effective than other instructional models in improving poetry-writing skills. This learning approach engages students in active processes such as observing images, discussing them, and writing poems based on their interpretations. This is in line with Kolb's theory, which says that students learn best when they have real-life experiences (Pamungkas & Widiastuti, 2019).

Findings from previous studies also reinforce the effectiveness of the experiential learning approach supported by images in enhancing poetry-writing abilities. Research by Siti Nur Afifatul Hikmah and Siti Lailatul Badriyah (Nur et al., 2023) shows that when teachers use visual media in their writing classes, students' ability to think creatively and write poetry gets better.

This improvement is apparent from the comparison of gain scores in both classes. The average posttest score of the experimental class increased more significantly

compared with the control class. These data indicate that visual stimuli provided through picture media can more optimally facilitate students' imagination in the poetry-creation process. This finding is consistent with Paivio's Dual Coding Theory, which states that information is more easily processed and remembered when presented through a combination of verbal and visual stimuli (Allah et al., 2024). In the context of poetry writing, images offer a concrete foundation that helps students develop abstract ideas, choose diction, and build poetic atmosphere. The experiential learning model also plays an essential role in this improvement. Kolb explains that learning through direct experience encourages active knowledge construction through four cyclical stages: concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation (Pamungkas & Widiastuti, 2019). In the experimental class, picture media enriched the concrete experience stage, making the learning cycle more meaningful. This explains why the poetry-writing skills of students in the experimental class improved more significantly.

Student Response to the Learning Model

After the students practiced writing poetry with visual media as part of the experiential learning method, the researchers gave them questionnaires. At the end of the learning process, 23 students filled out a questionnaire to give feedback on the learning model that was used. Student responses were categorized into five groups: very positive, positive, neutral, negative, and very negative. Based on the results, it was concluded that across all four assessed aspects ease of use, efficiency, interest, and usefulness—the Experiential Learning Model assisted by Picture Media received highly positive and significant responses from students. Thus, the improvement in poetry-writing skills in the experimental class was visible not only quantitatively but also through the quality of the students' work. Overall, students demonstrated more focused and developed ideas, more varied diction choices, and a more consistent ability to build atmosphere and emotion. The structure of the poems they produced also appeared more coherent than those of the control class. These findings reinforce the pedagogical value of visual media, as stated by Smaldino, Lowther, and Russell, who argue that visual media can provide concrete learning contexts, enhance material relevance, expand attention, and stimulate creativity by strengthening visual associations (Smaldino, Lowther, Russell, 2024). Thus, the use of images in the poetry-writing process helps students build richer imaginative stimulation.

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory also explains the connection between picture media and improved student work quality. Vygotsky emphasizes that optimal learning occurs when students receive scaffolding that enables them to reach the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Tohari & Rahman, 2024). In this context, picture media act as visual scaffolding, helping students link concrete experiences to more refined linguistic representations. The visualizations provided through images enable students to construct meaning, formulate creative ideas, and transform them into stronger and more structured poetic expressions. This aligns with Kusuma's view that concrete learning experiences accelerate the internalization of abstract concepts, including creative writing skills (Sumi, 2025).

The outcomes of using the experiential learning model with visual media benefit not only students' writing and cognitive abilities but also their emotional responses. Most students reported that visual aids enhanced their idea-generation ability, increased their enthusiasm for writing, helped them better organize their creative process, and made

poetry learning more engaging overall. Consistent with other studies, this research found that visual learning media can increase student engagement, attentiveness, and overall motivation (Heinich, R., 2012). These encouraging results indicate that visual media influence the affective domain crucial in language acquisition alongside the cognitive domain.

The implications of these findings demonstrate that poetry writing instruction requires stimuli that help students imagine experiences, situations, and emotions more concretely. The experiential learning model, bolstered by visual media, has demonstrated its efficacy in optimizing tangible experiences, fostering active student engagement, reinforcing the link between experience and linguistic expression, and augmenting students' creative and visual cognitive skills. This model effectively stimulates higher-order thinking processes, as described by Kolb (1984) in the experiential learning cycle, by giving students chances to experience, observe, reflect, and express ideas through poetry.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study and data analysis indicate that students' poetry-writing skills improved more effectively through the experiential learning model using visual media compared with traditional lecture-based instruction. Increases in average scores, normalized gain values, and the quality of the poetry the experimental class produced demonstrate this effectiveness. The use of picture media helped students generate ideas more easily, expand visual associations, and stimulate imagination, enabling them to express them more creatively, coherently, and purposefully. The highly positive student responses also reinforce the finding that picture media influence not only cognitive aspects but also students' motivation, interest, and emotional engagement in the poetry-writing process. These results show how important it is to use teaching tools that give students real-world experiences and spark their imaginations when teaching poetry. Teachers of Indonesian as a foreign or second language can successfully adopt the experiential learning model with visual media to support students' creative writing development in Islamic junior high schools and similar educational institutions. The model's emphasis on observation, experience, and reflection makes it applicable not only to poetry but also to other forms of creative writing, including descriptive texts, short stories, and essays. Therefore, this study contributes meaningfully to the development of new student-centered approaches in Indonesian language instruction.

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