

## EFL learners' perceptions on picture-based writing and its influence on their writing performance



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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore Saudi university English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' perception of picture-based writing (PBW) and its perceived impact on their writing development. A descriptive research design was employed with a sample of 111 first-year engineering students across three proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. For data collection, a structured questionnaire was used, consisting of closed-ended Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The correlation analysis showed that the learners' perceptions of the effects of PBW on creativity, coherence, vocabulary skills, and confidence in writing were significantly positive. The findings revealed that EFL learners have positive attitudes toward PBW. The results also indicated positive perceptions in other key areas such as motivation and engagement, critical thinking and interpretation, learning and retention, and cultural and social awareness. It was also found that the perceptions of the learners vary depending on the level of learning, with advanced learners having a more positive attitude than beginners. These findings are informative for educators and curriculum developers seeking strategies to facilitate the teaching of writing in EFL classrooms and to determine which strategies are appropriate for teaching lower and higher-achieving students. Additionally, the study introduces the PBW Perceptions model as a comprehensive framework for understanding these learner responses.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study offers original insights into Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of picture-based writing across proficiency levels. It highlights how PBW influences key writing skills and proposes a novel PBW Perceptions Model to inform future EFL writing instruction and research.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Saudi Arabia, the education sector has long integrated the use of visual stimuli as a means of increasing students' attention and comprehension in language education. With the ongoing transformation of the global EFL teaching and learning landscape, Saudi Arabia's EFL teaching environment has also adopted PBW as a contemporary approach to enhance students' writing skills. In this context, visual stimuli help foster creativity, assist students in generating new ideas, and improve vocabulary development and coherence. According to Albarqi (2025), the use of images in writing classes helps Saudi students form mental pictures of their ideas, thereby enhancing their descriptive writing skills and the overall quality of their work. Visual cues also aid Saudi students in overcoming some writing challenges, such as lack of ideas and writer's block, since pictures facilitate the creation of related mental imagery for thought generation. Therefore, it is essential to understand how university-level EFL learners in Saudi Arabia perceive this method to ensure that teaching strategies and curriculum structures are effectively developed within the Saudi context.

Educational institutions are increasingly adopting visual-based teaching approaches because these methods effectively address typical EFL writing problems, including student motivation issues, vocabulary limitations, and difficulties in organizing ideas (Fauziah & Suliyah, 2024). The educational outcome of using picture-based prompts manifests as mental cues that help students build verbal connections between the visual material and language skills, thus producing more advanced written work. Research has shown that visual cues effectively improve students' capability to write detailed and flowing text with an organized structure and logical flow. This study investigates Saudi EFL university students' perceptions regarding PBW and its effects on their writing abilities. The study examines this technique's effect on creativity development, student language progression, and writing confidence. Research into these views helps determine the effectiveness of PBW methods in real classroom environments with students at different proficiency levels.

Studies on the effectiveness of visual prompts in language education have demonstrated encouraging results. According to Eswaey and Ihmoumah (2024), self-assessment improves student writing through visual aids, which serve as concrete reference points for reflection. Students who use self-assessment and visual prompts can verify their work more thoroughly, enabling them to understand what they excel at and which aspects require development. Sunengko and Nurfaisal (2024) emphasize that interactive teaching approaches, including Suggestopedia, lead to better student writing results. Participatory interaction within this system aligns with PBW principles because it provides a fully immersive experience that promotes active engagement and creative expression. Visual prompts enable accessibility of writing assignments while making them enjoyable, which calms students' apprehension about writing and boosts their self-confidence in written composition.

Research has not thoroughly examined how students at different proficiency levels interpret PBW techniques. Albarqi (2025) argues that task-based performance varies among students at varying proficiency levels since their linguistic abilities affect their responses to visual prompts. Student proficiency determines how they use visual prompts since beginners depend on images to build their vocabulary framework and streamline sentences. In contrast, advanced students use pictures to craft complex and detailed written work. The research addresses this knowledge gap by studying how Saudi EFL learners at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels perceive PBW tasks. Research into these proficiency-level variations will create a comprehensive framework for using visual-based techniques to serve various student demographics.

This research investigation is essential because it provides knowledge that can guide educational teaching methods and curriculum development. Educators should use findings about which PBW elements students find easy or challenging to create instructional methods that specifically address their needs. Some students benefit from PBW when brainstorming, but other students experience difficulties when they need to translate images into written text and interpret visual content. The relationship between using visual prompts and improving writing skills enables educators to design appropriate strategies and materials for increasing coherence, vocabulary, and writing quality in EFL learning settings (Denison, 2024). The data obtained can be considered as an instructional material design guide for the creation of active learning programs that increase the quality of student learning in class.

This article aims to investigate the perceptions of Saudi university EFL learners on PBW and its perceived impact on their writing performance. As visual prompts are commonly accepted as effective teaching tools, it is vital to understand the perceptions of language learners regarding the impact of this approach on their writing skills development. The study will provide valuable insights into how learners from different proficiency levels perceive PBW and its role in enhancing their writing skills.

### 1.1. Primary Objectives

1. This research investigates how students perceive PBW as an approach to enhance their writing skills.
2. The research examines whether beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners hold different viewpoints about their writing skills development through a picture-based approach.

3. The research aims to identify which aspects of the PBW approach students find helpful or problematic.

### 1.2. Research Questions

1. What perceptions do Saudi university EFL learners hold regarding PBW?
2. How does PBW affect EFL learners' writing performance?
3. Do the perceptions of PBW differ significantly among those EFL learners based on their language proficiency?

### 1.3. Significance

This study draws upon various theoretical and empirical findings to answer its research questions. The increasing use of artificial intelligence tools for writing performance assessments requires reliable and diverse evaluation methods, according to [Kim et al. \(2024\)](#). Incorporating PBW assessments into current evaluative systems may lead to a better understanding of student writing abilities and educational advancement. Educators can improve student writing assessments by integrating standard testing methods with modern visual assessment approaches to identify precise areas needing support. The research aims to augment understanding in the field of visual-based teaching approaches by providing concrete educational recommendations for teaching professionals and curriculum developers. The study focuses on EFL learners' perceptions of PBW to improve writing instruction effectiveness and create student-oriented learning spaces. The gathered information is expected to benefit classroom instruction and further research investigations about visual literacy in language learning. The research intends to develop modern EFL writing instruction methods by studying how students experience and prefer learning through pictures.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Insights into EFL Learners' Perceptions on PBW as a Teaching Tool

EFL instruction has shown growing interest in visual-based teaching strategies. These strategies are known to enhance writing performance among learners. Visual triggers help students overcome writing obstacles. They also assist in selecting appropriate words, expressing ideas creatively, and maintaining focus. [Qasserras \(2024\)](#) emphasizes that visual learning tools help students with different learning styles because visual stimuli create better understanding and memory retention through cognitive engagement. [Pratiwi, Nugrahani, Sohnui, and Taher \(2024\)](#) show that students wrote better descriptions when they used comic-based storytelling. The pictures gave them clear and interesting ideas to work with. When students made their own visual cues, their written narratives became more detailed. It also helped them stay organized and be more creative.

### 2.2. Theoretical Concepts Underpinning PBW

The rationale for using PBW in EFL education is informed by the following linguistic and learning theories that explain the benefits of this approach in enhancing students' writing skills. The integration of these theories strengthens the overall framework of the study and allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the results in light of existing theories. For example, the Multimodal Learning Theory by [Kress and van Leeuwen \(2001\)](#) posits that learning and communication involve not only language. Combining visual (pictures) and linguistic (texts) modes of communication can improve understanding and writing skills, as the visual mode offers an alternative channel for information processing, which benefits language learners. [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) socio-cultural theory further enriches the understanding of the learning process by emphasizing that learning is a social activity that involves interaction and is mediated by cultural tools, with audio-visual resources serving as powerful instruments for language mediation ([Peña, Rojas, León, & Pérez, 2024](#)). The use of pictures can help in scaffolding, where the teacher or more capable peers can assist learners in their writing and also foster peer cooperation through discussion and interpretation of pictures before writing. [Bartlett's \(1932\)](#) schema theory posits that the learner employs prior knowledge and experiences that are organized in mental structures, referred to as schemas, to interpret new information ([Carbon &](#)

Albrecht, 2012). Visual prompts can help learners recall relevant schemas that can be used as the basis for constructing written text, which is useful for idea and content generation.

Cognitive Load Theory, as postulated by Sweller (1988) looks at learning and the amount of effort needed for it; while related research shows picture-based learning is less straining and more effective than text-based learning, the use of animation in instruction imposes even less extraneous cognitive load compared to the use of static pictures (Eitel & Scheiter, 2015; Yang, Jen, Chang, & Yeh, 2018; Yu & Liu, 2022). Incorporation of pictures in writing can either enhance or hinder learners' cognitive load; effective use of pictures in writing can help reduce extraneous cognitive load by providing a context in which the learner can write.

In addition, there is theoretical support from the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning by Mayer (2009). This theory asserts that learners receive information through visual and verbal means, and learning is more effective if both modes are activated. This theory is supported by PBW since it combines both the picture and verbal stimuli to enhance the processing and storage of information. Consequently, the research gains a much stronger theoretical framework, which in turn provides a more comprehensive discussion of the results according to these concepts by making these theoretical links more visible and clearer.

Through the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning developed by Mayer (2009), PBW obtains theoretical strength because dual-channel processing enables learners to retain information better by connecting visual and verbal data. In EFL writing activities, the addition of pictures allows students to combine images and words, thus developing their cognitive functions and language processing skills. It is through this approach that the necessity of visual cues in language learning is thoroughly demonstrated, as these visual cues provide contextual information that students utilize to write texts that are better organized and more meaningful.

The implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) supports the effectiveness of PBW (Prabhu, 1987). Empirical studies indicate that meaningful tasks that combine active problem-solving with authentic communication should be used to develop language skills, according to Gogoi (2024). Visual prompts match this teaching method because they present stimuli that help students produce meaningful written work. The selected theoretical framework makes writing activities applicable to practical use in everyday situations so students become more motivated and engaged.

### *2.3. Identification of Specific Benefits and Challenges Associated with PBW*

Students who use pictures to write their assignments benefit from better vocabulary learning, improved writing coherence, and increased writing motivation. According to Zulkepli, Abd Hamid, and Dajani (2024), incorporating interactive visual tools through mobile applications improves students' comprehension and memory in Arabic. Kakitani and Kormos (2024) explain how spaced repetition benefits language fluency, but they demonstrate that spaced learning enhances student performance in terms of both lexical complexity and writing coherence. The research demonstrates that visual tools are essential to developing students' ability to effectively describe and structure their thoughts.

Implementing PBW methods brings along specific obstacles despite its numerous benefits. A scoping review by Fujisawa, Doi, and Shintani (2024) analyzes the depth of processing to show that visual feedback tools allow students to interact better with their corrections, but students frequently face difficulties in interpreting those visual signals correctly. Student ability to transform visual cues into written text varies, according to Eswaey and Ihmoumah (2024) in their analysis. The research indicates that EFL students require specific teaching methods to help them overcome differences in their visual literacy skills.

### *2.4. Evidence of Variations in Learners' Perceptions Based on Proficiency Levels*

The perception of PBW may differ from one learner to another depending on the level of proficiency in EFL. Albarqi (2025), for instance, it establishes that task-based performance varies with the students' linguistic abilities

since the level of proficiency determines how the learners approach the visuals. This variation in the learners' perceptions based on the proficiency level is one of the areas of interest in the current study. Advanced language learners typically create detailed, sophisticated writing, while beginners rely on image recognition as a starting point for essential content and elementary syntax. The research conducted by [Dosi, Kouki, Lada, and Keulen \(2024\)](#) examines how bilingual learners use complex language patterns in their written narratives shaped by visual stimuli. The study shows that educators must evaluate student language abilities and proficiency when creating PBW tasks to provide equal opportunities for language development.

### *2.5. Insights from Previous Studies on Effective Implementation of PBW*

The number of studies on visual-based teaching methods continues to grow, yet researchers have identified additional areas of investigation as gaps. [Albarqi \(2025\)](#) observes that research lacks extensive investigations into how visual prompts affect the writing abilities of EFL learners at different proficiency levels. The use of technology to support PBW has not received sufficient academic investigation. [Kim, Kogan, and Zhang \(2024\)](#) examine the possibilities of using gamification and game-based methods in language learning by demonstrating that digital visual prompts may enhance student engagement and motivation. The research evidence regarding these instructional approaches in EFL writing instruction remains limited.

Another gap pertains to teacher preparedness and instructional design. The researcher [Ibralaela \(2023\)](#) advocates additional research about EFL teachers' methods for implementing visual-based activities because teachers need proper training and educational resources. Further research should study beneficial teaching approaches for developing teachers and visual learning strategies for multicultural classrooms.

Therefore, research shows that using pictorial writing in EFL instruction leads to significant changes in language education that improve creativity, language development capabilities, and writing coherence. Different proficiency levels of students, together with visual literacy obstacles, require specific instructional approaches for effective teaching. Educators should utilize findings from previous research to establish dynamic and structured educational environments combined with collaborative technology that helps various learners properly acquire languages effectively.

### *2.6. Insights from Previous Studies on Effective Implementation of PBW*

The literature has shown limited research regarding university-level Saudi EFL students' views on PBW and its effects on their writing abilities. Research by [Qasserras \(2024\)](#) and [Pratiwi et al. \(2024\)](#) investigated visual aids for language skill improvement but did not explicitly evaluate the effects of PBW on key aspects of writing performance such as creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and confidence. Studies on visual prompts in the current literature primarily focus on lower educational grades or general teaching approaches rather than testing their effects on university-level EFL students. Research lacks investigation into how beginner, intermediate, and advanced EFL learners in Saudi Arabia perceive and react to PBW techniques. [Albarqi \(2025\)](#) finds that students with different linguistic abilities perform differently in tasks, which demonstrates that proficiency levels determine students' visual prompt interaction. The current research has lacked sufficient expansion into writing performance, which creates an essential knowledge gap about how visual-based strategies address student diversity needs in higher education. The research conducted by [Eswaey and Ihmoumah \(2024\)](#) and [Sunengko and Nurfaizal \(2024\)](#) demonstrated the advantages of visual aid-based self-assessment and interactive techniques, yet failed to address the particular needs of EFL learners in classroom PBW.

The absence of practical considerations in these studies has hindered the use of visual methods for creating writing curricula that meet student requirements. This study addresses the existing knowledge gap by conducting a specific investigation into perceptions of Saudi university EFL learners regarding PBW, along with its effects on their writing abilities. The study evaluates different proficiency levels of learners to understand their perceptions of



this approach, with the goal of developing effective inclusive teaching practices. The research aims to expand current knowledge about visual prompts and to address the identified weaknesses to present more precise insights about language and writing progress support in the Saudi context.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed in the current study to examine EFL learners' perceptions regarding the use of PBW in English language courses. The study aimed to explore the perceived impact of visual prompts on EFL learners' writing performance. Descriptive designs are commonly used in educational research to obtain current opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a particular group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A structured questionnaire was designed and utilized for data collection to capture learners' views across multiple dimensions, and the analysis was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

#### 3.2. Participants

The research sample included 111 first-year engineering students at a public university in Saudi Arabia. These students were enrolled in an English language course in their first semester of the academic year 2024. The research group comprised male and female students with varying English proficiency levels. The participants' English proficiency levels were determined through final exam scores from the English course, categorized into three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The study required students with different proficiency levels to comprehensively understand PBW because it allowed the researcher to compare various language abilities effectively.

#### 3.3. Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data (see Appendix). The goal was to find out how EFL learners viewed PBW and how they perceived its impact on their writing skills. The questionnaire consisted of 30 Likert scale questions, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). These items assessed the research focus by determining how PBW impacted creativity and idea generation, coherence and organization, vocabulary and descriptive skills, motivation and engagement, confidence in writing, critical thinking and interpretation, learning and retention, and cultural and social awareness, all of which are supported by the theoretical perspectives mentioned earlier (see Table 1). In addition to the Likert-scale items, the questionnaire also included open-ended questions to gain deeper insights into learners' experiences, challenges, and suggestions related to PBW.

The following measures were taken to enhance the credibility of the collected data. First, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic and checked by a professional translator who had a good command of both English and Arabic languages. Then, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in the field of EFL education to determine its face validity and to ensure that all the questions posed were relevant to the research objectives. To reduce social desirability bias, participation in the study was voluntary, and all responses were kept anonymous and confidential. Some questions were written indirectly to minimize social pressure. The questions focused on recent experiences rather than long-term memories to avoid recall bias.

To enhance the validity of the study, a pilot test was conducted on a small sample of students to assess the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the items.

The results obtained from the pilot study were incorporated to improve the instrument's efficiency in assessing participants' perceptions, and the necessary changes were made accordingly. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha test, which demonstrated excellent reliability ( $\alpha > 0.89$ ), indicating strong internal consistency among the items.

### 3.4. Theoretical Framework

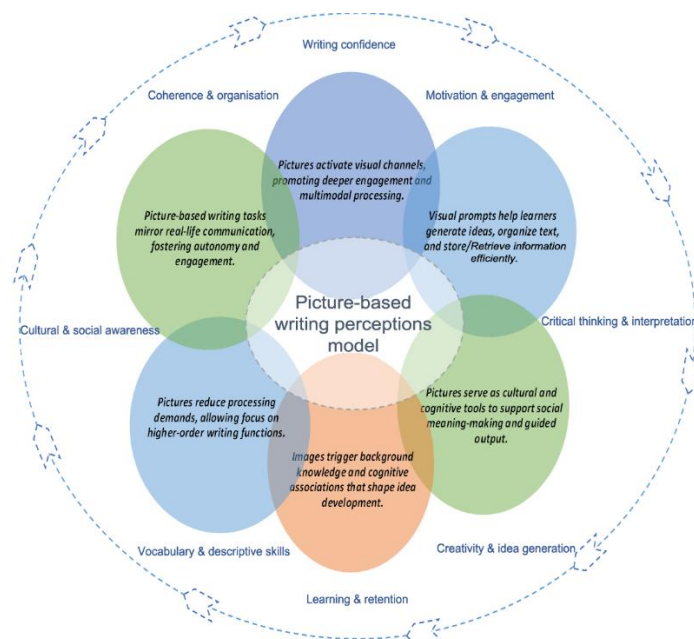
The questionnaire design was guided by six theoretical frameworks that together formed the theoretical foundation of the Picture-Based Writing Perceptions (PBWP) Model (see Figure 1).

- Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932).
- Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Prabhu, 1987).
- Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988).
- Multimodal Learning Theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).
- Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009).

The table shows how each theory is connected to relevant questionnaire constructs:

**Table 1.** Theoretical framework underpinning the design of the questionnaire on PBW.

Theory	Key concepts	Application to PBW	Related questionnaire constructs
Schema theory (Bartlett, 1932)	Learners build new understanding based on prior knowledge activated by stimuli.	Images trigger background knowledge and cognitive associations that shape idea development.	- Coherence and Organisation- Creativity and Idea Generation- Vocabulary and Descriptive Skills
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978)	Learning is socially mediated; tools and context scaffold higher-order thinking.	Pictures serve as cultural and cognitive tools to support social meaning-making and guided output.	- Cultural and Social Awareness- Critical Thinking and Interpretation- Writing Confidence
Task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Prabhu, 1987)	Language is acquired through meaningful, goal-driven tasks.	PBW tasks mirror real-life communication, fostering autonomy and engagement.	- Creativity and Idea Generation- Coherence and Organisation- Motivation and Engagement
Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988)	Reducing cognitive load optimizes mental resources for learning.	Pictures reduce processing demands, allowing focus on higher-order writing functions.	- Learning and Retention- Critical Thinking- Motivation and Engagement
Multimodal learning theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001)	Learning involves multiple modes of communication (visual, verbal, spatial).	Pictures activate visual channels, promoting deeper engagement and multimodal processing.	- Creativity and Idea Generation- Motivation and Engagement- Writing Confidence
Cognitive theory of multimedia learning (Mayer, 2009)	Learning improves when visual and verbal input are combined through dual channels.	Visual prompts help learners generate ideas, organize text, and store/retrieve information efficiently.	- Vocabulary and Descriptive Skills- Coherence and Organisation- Learning and Retention



**Figure 1.** PBWP model.

### 3.5. Procedure

The subjects of this study were enrolled in English classes in which PBW activities were incorporated into the learning-teaching process and employed in the assessment of learning outcomes. In their day-to-day learning, they were required to complete several PBW tasks aimed at improving their writing skills. These assignments involved the use of visuals, for which the students had to write coherent texts explaining their ideas and perceptions. After completing these writing activities, participants filled out a questionnaire to provide information on their PBW. In addition to the questionnaires, the participants' age, gender, and English proficiency level were recorded as background information for the study.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to make conclusions based on the observed data. Apart from that, frequency analysis was undertaken to show the general findings of the study, which also demonstrated the overall view of the respondents as well as the typical answers to the posed questions. This involved determining the central tendency and dispersion of the data regarding the learners' perception of PBW by means of the averages, standard deviations, and frequency analysis. Descriptive statistics were applied to provide information regarding the data that were collected, while inferential statistics served as the basis for generalizing the results to the population. In particular, an ANOVA test was used to evaluate the factors studied as perceived by the learners at three different levels of English proficiency: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. This made it possible for the researcher to establish whether proficiency level affected the perception that the learners had of the effectiveness of PBW on their writing skills. In addition, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation tests were performed to assess the learners' perceptions of PBW along with their writing performance in the dimensions of creativity and idea generation, coherence and organization, vocabulary skills, and confidence in writing. This analysis was implemented to evaluate the correlation between the variables, whether positive or negative, and the magnitude of the correlation between them. The choice of these statistical methods was based on the research questions and the need to analyze the quantitative data collected from the respondents using the questionnaire. Thus, adopting both descriptive and inferential statistics, the study sought to gain insight into EFL learners' perceptions of PBW and to make conclusions that would be useful for teaching practices and curriculum design.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Descriptive Analysis

#### 4.1.1. Gender

The research participant data showed a significant imbalance between male and female participants. The research included 111 first-year Engineering students, 82 of whom were male, resulting in a sample distribution of 73.9%, as displayed in Table 2 and Figure 2. The female participants numbered 29 students, who comprised 26.1% of the total student sample. The gender imbalance in participant demographics required special attention when analyzing the study's research outcomes. The research sought to understand EFL learners' views on PBW. Yet, the dominant male participant population could limit the study's ability to generalize findings across a gender-equal population.

**Table 2.** Gender.

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Male	82	73.9	73.9	73.9
	Female	29	26.1	26.1	100.0
	Total	111	100.0	100.0	



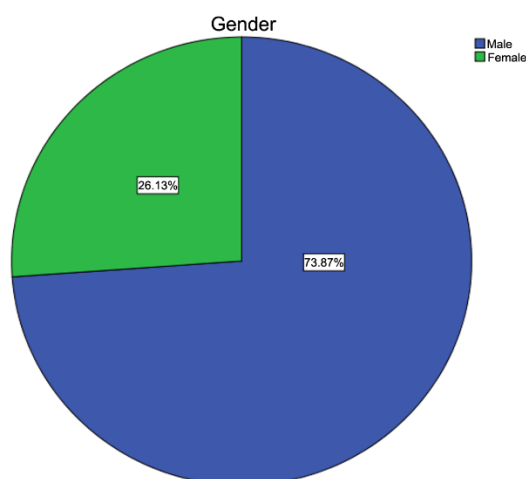


Figure 2. Gender distribution.

#### 4.1.2. Proficiency Level

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of the sample with regard to participants, indicating a slant toward more advanced learners. Of the 111 participants, 70 were advanced, constituting 63.1% of the total. The second largest group consisted of 29 students (26.1%) who were intermediate-level learners. The smallest group was beginner-level learners, with only 12 students or 10.8% of the sample. The uneven distribution is an essential consideration for the analysis and interpretation of the study. While these changes allow the comparison between learners of different proficiency levels, the majority of advanced learners may limit the generalizability of the findings to lower proficiency groups. As shown in Figure 3, this distribution is visually represented, clearly emphasizing the larger proportion of advanced learners compared to other groups.

Table 3. Proficiency level.

Proficiency Level		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Advanced	70	63.1	63.1	63.1
	Intermediate	29	26.1	26.1	89.2
	Beginner	12	10.8	10.8	100.0
	Total	111	100.0	100.0	

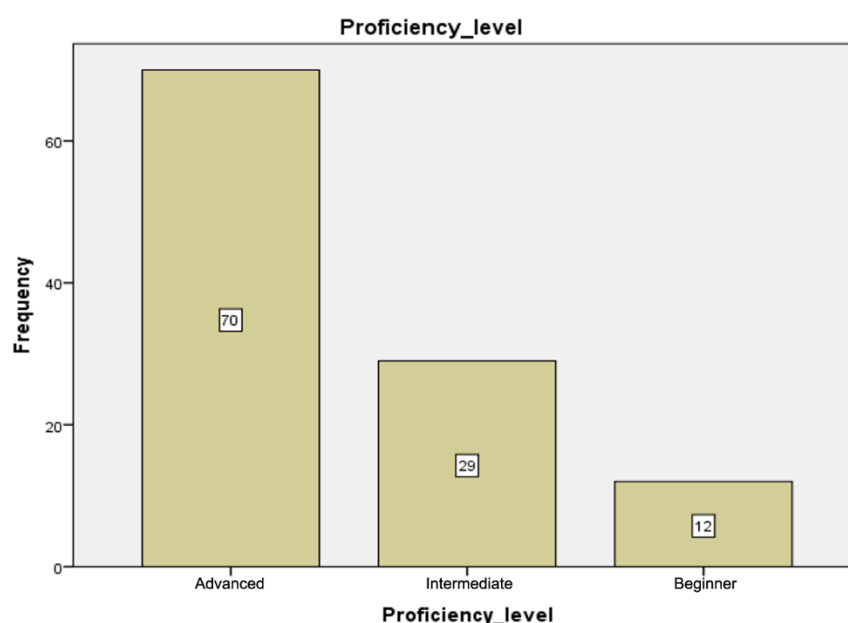


Figure 3. Proficiency distribution.

#### 4.2. Perceptions of EFL Learners Regarding Writing with Pictures

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to examine EFL learners' perceptions of PBW across specific dimensions as shown in Table 4. The dimensions included Creativity and Idea Generation, Coherence and Organisation, Vocabulary and Descriptive Skills, Motivation and Engagement, Confidence in Writing, Critical Thinking and Interpretation, Learning and Retention, and Cultural and Social Awareness. The purpose of the analysis was to present a comprehensive overview of the learners' views on using pictures in their writing processes. Overall, the findings indicated that EFL learners generally held positive perceptions of PBW. The eight dimensions received scores ranging from 3.58 to 3.90, suggesting that participants mostly agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding this educational method. The highest level of agreement was observed in Vocabulary and Descriptive Skills, with a mean score of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 1.15. Students believed that pictures serve as effective tools to enhance their vocabulary and descriptive writing skills. Supporting these quantitative results, open-ended responses highlighted the effectiveness of visual stimuli in vocabulary development. One learner shared: "It helps me describe things better and use more imagination," while another noted that pictures "help me learn new words and write more details."

The results showed that learners rated picture prompts at 3.87 with a standard deviation of 1.14 for their ability to generate creativity and new ideas. In line with this, many learners explained in their responses that PBW helped them visualize ideas and overcome writer's block. One student noted: "It allows me to visualize the essay I am going to write," reflecting how visual cues supported idea generation and structure planning.

The participants gave a score of 3.86 (SD = 1.14) for Confidence in Writing and Learning and Retention. The study demonstrated that students using pictures for writing developed enhanced writing self-assurance and improved their information learning and retention abilities. This was echoed in the open responses. One learner remarked: "It helps me remember," while another stated: "It gives me more confidence when I write because I can see what to write about." The mean ratings for Coherence and Organisation (M = 3.58, SD = 1.16), Motivation and Engagement (M = 3.68, SD = 1.20), and Cultural and Social Awareness (M = 3.59, SD = 1.22) were lower than those for other skills, although they still recorded positive scores. The dimension of Cultural and Social Awareness exhibited the largest standard deviation of 1.22 across all dimensions, indicating that students had differing perceptions about PBW in this area. Some learners emphasized the motivational aspects in the open-ended responses, explaining that PBW made writing tasks "more interesting" and "less boring." However, others indirectly highlighted the need for the inclusion of clearer and more relevant pictures to improve understanding, stating that: "Sometimes the pictures are unclear," or "It is difficult when I don't know what the picture means."

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics.

Dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Creativity_Idea_Generation	111	1.00	5.00	3.8739	1.13712
Coherence_organisation	111	1.00	5.00	3.5766	1.16424
Vocabulary_skills	111	1.00	5.00	3.9009	1.15172
Motivation_Engagement	111	1.00	5.00	3.6847	1.19835
Confidence_writing	111	1.00	5.00	3.8559	1.14294
Critical_thinking_interpretation	111	1.00	5.00	3.7477	1.09933
Learning_retention	111	1.00	5.00	3.8378	1.14050
Cultural_social_awarenes	111	1.00	5.00	3.5946	1.22384
Valid N (Listwise)	111				

#### 4.3. Impact of PBW on EFL Learners' Writing Performance

The learners expressed their perceptions of how PBW affected their writing performance, mainly in terms of creativity and idea generation, coherence and organization, vocabulary skills, and confidence in writing. Table 5 displays the relationship between the English language learners' views regarding the effect of PBW on the development of key aspects of their writing performance, such as creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and confidence.

The aim of this analysis was to explore whether the benefits perceived in one of the skill areas extended to the other skill areas while students used visuals as prompts. This was conducted by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficients, which serve as a measure of both the strength and direction of the linear relationships observed between the different variables. The correlations determined were statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ), thus establishing a high standard of the results' reliability. The correlational analysis revealed a pattern of positive correlations that were both statistically significant and strong. This overarching finding implies that learners who believe that PBW is beneficial for one aspect of their writing are also likely to perceive it as helpful for the other elements under consideration. In other words, the perceived benefits of PBW are generalized across creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and confidence rather than being limited to one of these areas.

The specifics were examined, and it was shown that perceived Creativity and Idea Generation had strong positive correlations with each of the other writing dimensions. Most importantly, Creativity and Idea Generation ( $r = 0.742$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Coherence and Organisation were significantly positively correlated. This particular strong association suggests that if learners believe that PBW effectively stimulates their creativity and idea generation, they also strongly agree that it helps to improve the coherence and logical organisation of their written work. This is supported by students' comments in the open-ended section. One student wrote, "When I see a picture, I get many ideas at once, and I can organize them better," indicating a perceived link between image-based inspiration and clearer textual structure. Additionally, there were also significant positive correlations between Creativity and Vocabulary Skills ( $r = 0.671$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as between Creativity and Vocabulary Skills and Confidence in Writing ( $r = 0.685$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Another student noted, "Pictures help me to describe more things with new words," illustrating how visuals enhanced lexical access and richness. The analysis demonstrated that Vocabulary Skills were also significantly correlated ( $r = .613$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the same applies to Confidence in Writing ( $r = 0.644$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The findings indicate that learners perceive a connection between the ability to use picture-based prompts to help sequence ideas logically, improve vocabulary, and increase confidence in writing. One learner mentioned, "With pictures, I am not afraid to start writing," highlighting the motivational role visuals play in reducing writing anxiety. It was also found that there was a strong positive correlation between Vocabulary Skills and Confidence in Writing ( $r = 0.721$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This strong relationship suggests that learners who believe that PBW helps them expand their vocabulary also report increased confidence in their overall writing competence when using picture-based prompts. This relationship was echoed in another response: "When I learn new words from the pictures, I feel proud and want to write more." Finally, the correlational analysis supports a network of interrelated positive relationships among learners' perceptions of creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and confidence in the context of PBW.

**Table 5.** Correlation analysis.

Correlations		Creativity_idea_ generation	Coherence_ organisation	Vocabulary_ skills	Confidence_ writing
Creativity_idea_ generation	Pearson Correlation	1	0.742**	0.671**	0.685**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0	0
	N	111	111	111	111
Coherence_ organisation	Pearson Correlation	0.742**	1	0.613**	0.644**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0
	N	111	111	111	111
Vocabulary_skills	Pearson Correlation	0.671**	0.613**	1	0.721**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0
	N	111	111	111	111
Confidence_ writing	Pearson Correlation	0.685**	0.644**	0.721**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	
	N	111	111	111	111

**Note:** \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.4. Perceptions of PBW Across Proficiency Levels

To determine whether EFL learners' perceptions of PBW differ significantly across different proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced), an ANOVA was conducted, as shown in Table 6. Separate ANOVAs were performed for each of the following dependent variables: Creativity and Idea Generation, Coherence and Organisation, Vocabulary Skills, and Confidence in Writing. These analyses aimed to identify whether learners with varying levels of English proficiency have different perceptions regarding the role of PBW in these specific aspects of their writing performance. The results from the ANOVA indicated statistically significant differences in learners' perceptions across the four writing dimensions at different proficiency levels. The main effect of proficiency level was significant:  $F(2, 108) = 6.624$ ,  $p = 0.002$  for Creativity and Idea Generation. This finding suggests that learners with different proficiency levels perceive the role of picture writing differently in contributing to creativity and idea-generation skills. The mean scores reveal that more advanced learners view PBW as more beneficial for creativity and idea generation compared to beginner learners.

Likewise, the main effect of proficiency level was found in Coherence and Organisation,  $F(2, 108) = 5.127$ ,  $p = 0.007$ . This result indicates that learners' views on the effect of PBW on the coherence and organisation of their writing vary greatly depending on their proficiency level. As with the other two questions, advanced learners again tend to report higher agreement with the positive effects of PBW on coherence and organisation. The main effect of proficiency level was also significant in Vocabulary Skills analysis,  $F(2, 108) = 8.822$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . This strong result suggests that learners' perceptions of how PBW affects their vocabulary skills differ greatly based on their proficiency level. The advanced learners show the most positive perceptions, then intermediate and finally beginner learners.

The ANOVA for Confidence in Writing also had a significant main effect on proficiency level,  $F(2, 108) = 3.277$ ,  $p = 0.042$ . While this result is statistically significant, the p-value is closer to the significance threshold, implying that the differences in perceptions of confidence may be less pronounced than in the other writing dimensions. However, the pattern remains the same, with the most positive views coming from the advanced learners. Overall, the ANOVA results indicate that learners' views on PBW in terms of creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and confidence are significantly affected by their English proficiency level.

**Table 6.** ANOVA analysis.

Variables		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Creativity_idea_generation	Between groups	15.540	2	7.770	6.624	0.002
	Within groups	126.694	108	1.173		
	Total	142.234	110			
Coherence_organisation	Between groups	12.929	2	6.465	5.127	0.007
	Within groups	136.170	108	1.261		
	Total	149.099	110			
Vocabulary_skills	Between groups	20.489	2	10.245	8.822	0.000
	Within groups	125.420	108	1.161		
	Total	145.910	110			
Confidence_writing	Between groups	8.221	2	4.111	3.277	0.042
	Within groups	135.473	108	1.254		
	Total	143.694	110			

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of Saudi university EFL learners regarding PBW and its impact on their writing performance, as there is a need to understand how this approach affects language development. The main research questions were threefold: (1) To examine what perceptions EFL learners hold regarding writing with pictures; (2) To assess how PBW influenced learners' writing performance; (3) To determine if there were any differences in views among learners of different proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). The main findings indicated that EFL learners generally held positive views on PBW, and that perceptions varied significantly

according to proficiency levels. In the following sections, the findings are discussed, followed by their implications for EFL pedagogy and research.

### 5.1. Strengths of PBW

The results of the study indicated that, in general, Saudi EFL learners were positive towards PBW. This is consistent with a general trend in EFL instruction that recognizes the benefits of visual-based teaching strategies in enhancing the writing performance of learners. The research on how visually stimulating methods serve as effective tools for language education has argued that writing impediments could be overcome and expression could be stimulated. According to the author [Qasserras \(2024\)](#) visual learning tools utilize different learning styles and aid in learning and memory retention through cognitive engagement. These positive perceptions are explained by theoretical frameworks, such as the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning ([Mayer, 2009](#)) which provides insight into how they can be understood. The argument made in this theory is that the dual channel integration of visual and verbal information enhances the learner's ability to retain information. Picture-based prompts are particularly useful in EFL writing, as these prompts enable students to perform dual channel processing by linking images to language, thereby making their writing experiences and outcomes more positive.

In particular, the study revealed strong agreement among learners on the positive effect of PBW on vocabulary, descriptive skills, and creativity and idea generation. This aligns with the notion that visual prompts can help to boost vocabulary acquisition and inspire creativity in EFL learners. [Albarqi \(2025\)](#) argues that using images in writing classes helps students create mental pictures of their ideas, which improves their descriptive writing skills. Connected to this is Bartlett's Schema Theory, which stipulates that images can spark prior knowledge and that the language associated with images might come most quickly and naturally ([Carbon & Albrecht, 2012](#)). PBW tasks also give visual cues that can facilitate learners' access to and use of their existing linguistic resources for more creative and expressive purposes.

The questionnaire's open-ended questions confirmed the above findings. A good number of the participants openly declared that images do aid them in "describing things better and using more imagination" and "visualizing the essay" before writing it. In addition, some students pointed out the advantage of vocabulary development, explaining how images stimulated the use of a more descriptive and varied language. One student pointed out that, "It helps me remember," implying that the visual prompts contributed to better memory retention and learning.

### 5.2. Areas for Improvement

Although the overall views towards using visuals in writing were generally favorable, the study also identified slightly lower scores in several areas of writing, such as coherence and organization, motivation and engagement, and cultural and social awareness. These findings imply that there are potential areas for improvement in the implementation of PBW activities. For example, lower scores in coherence and organization might suggest that more explicit instruction on effective writing related to visual prompts would be necessary. Visual cues were shown by [Pratiwi et al. \(2024\)](#) to teach coherence, although they dealt with comic-based storytelling, which is a sequential structure. This means, then, that various forms of visual prompts could be utilized in different ways to reach the highest level of effectiveness for students' skills in writing coherence. The matter of motivation and engagement, however, in the findings puts things in a rather unexpected manner. In particular, the images used in activities may influence the level of engagement, thus changing the images for picture-writing is useful. Finally, slightly lower scores in the field of cultural and social awareness notably imply that it is necessary to explicitly infuse the cultural factors in PBW around. For example, [Zulkepli, Abd Hamid, and Dajani \(2024\)](#) demonstrate the way visual aids can assist learners to grasp a certain idea in a specific cultural context. Thus, the inclusion of culturally relevant images and tasks in picture writing in EFL classrooms may improve the efficacy of the PBW.



These quantitative findings are paralleled by qualitative responses. Some students reported that obfuscated or abstract pictures were a hurdle, which made it hard to decide what to write. For instance, one student admitted: “The pictures are unclear or have hidden meanings,” while another lamented: “Sometimes, I don’t know what to write about.” Such statements indicate the necessity for more careful image selection and instructional scaffolding.

### 5.3. Positive Correlations

This study conducts a correlational analysis of EFL learners’ perceptions of creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and confidence in the context of PBW. This finding highlights the interdependence of these writing aspects: learners who find PBW helpful for one aspect are likely to find it helpful for the others as well. The results are consistent with other work that suggests that writing improvements in one area lead to beneficial improvements in other areas (e.g., (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 2003)). For instance, increased vocabulary development can improve confidence in producing more substantial, more organized, and more varied texts.

### 5.4. Implications for Pedagogy

This study has significant pedagogical implications due to the strong positive correlations observed here. These findings suggest that PBW can be an effective tool for holistic writing development in EFL classrooms. Instead of teaching isolated skills, educators can utilize picture-based activities to simultaneously develop creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and writing confidence. These aspects should be integrated into instructional strategies that interrelate them. For example, activities could explicitly connect vocabulary building with exercises that enhance coherence through visual prompts, promoting logical sequencing and descriptive language, which could be particularly effective. Such tasks might involve students generating numerous vocabulary items related to an image and then using that vocabulary to create a coherent narrative or descriptive piece of writing. To facilitate such integrated instruction, this study proposes the PBWP model, which identifies eight interrelated aspects shaping learners’ experiences and offers a practical framework for designing writing tasks that address multiple skills through visual input. Additionally, learners suggested improvements in the use of picture-based prompts, recommending that prompts be accompanied by guiding questions or contextual clues. For instance, one student stated: “Adding questions or hints with the pictures would be helpful,” emphasizing the importance of structured practice and support in visual writing tasks.

### 5.5. Significant Differences

The study employed ANOVA to demonstrate that EFL students’ perceptions of PBW are markedly divergent across different levels of proficiency: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. This finding is consistent with earlier evidence that students’ reactions and interactions with visual prompts depend on their proficiency. Albarqi (2025) notes that learners with various language skills perform differently in task-based writing activities. When planning and conducting PBW activities, the proficiency level is a significant factor that should be considered.

### 5.6. Advanced Learners’ Positive Views

Advanced learners displayed a more positive attitude towards PBW than beginner learners. This may be due to the fact that advanced learners are more linguistically equipped with the cognitive capacity to produce more complex and multilayered writings. In addition, the benefits of such a mechanism are that they effectively convert visual stimuli into highly constructed textual materials due to developing advanced skills for interpreting and using visual information. Dosi et al. (2024) also validate this statement, as they disclosed that the most advanced bilingual learners were capable of utilizing a more sophisticated language in their narratives based on visual input.

### 5.7. Beginner Learners' Challenges

However, beginner learners may find it difficult to use picture-based prompts for writing. With limited vocabulary or limited sentence structure, it could be more challenging for them to transform visual stimuli into coherent and expressive written text. Furthermore, beginner learners may require more help in understanding the visual information and generating ideas for writing. This shows that beginner learners in PBW activities require different and supported forms of instruction.

### 5.8. Pedagogical Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that picture-oriented writing tasks can be adapted to different proficiency levels. For beginners, it is crucial to reduce task complexity, starting with teaching basic vocabulary through very simple sentence structures and providing maximum scaffolding. These activities should include simplified visual prompts and structured templates to support learners in their writing. For intermediate learners, who are capable of reading simple stories and handling paragraphs with minimal supporting details, the complexity of story structure can be increased by incorporating more supporting and detailed information. Advanced learners can be engaged with picture-based prompts that promote sophisticated language use and foster critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and other complex cognitive skills. [Díaz, Moscol, Romero, and Morejón \(2024\)](#) agree that visual stimuli can enhance the English language teaching and learning process.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate PBW and how it affects EFL university learners' writing performance. The results of the study provided guidance on how learners perceive and respond to this pedagogical approach, given its ability to capture their attention in writing in multiple ways. The findings showed that EFL learners hold a generally positive view toward PBW. It is perceived to be a very useful tool in improving their writing skills and, in particular, vocabulary and descriptive skills, as well as in promoting creativity and idea generation. This is consistent with what is known about the use of visual prompts to facilitate language learning and how picture prompts can enhance language production and cognitive engagement.

Furthermore, the findings also revealed strong positive correlations between the perceptions of creativity, coherence, vocabulary, and learners' confidence in using PBW. This means that the improvement of one aspect of writing, for example, vocabulary, is associated with positive views of other areas of writing, such as writing confidence and coherence. This emphasizes the potential of PBW as a holistic approach to writing development.

However, the study also identified some areas where learners held less strong positive views, in particular: coherence and organization, motivation and engagement, and cultural and social awareness. The implications of these findings are that there is still room for attention in the design and implementation of PBW activities to maximize their effectiveness in these areas.

The study also showed that learners' views on PBW differ according to proficiency level. The research indicated that beginner learners hold more negative views than advanced learners, which suggests that instructional strategies may be more or less effective depending on the learners' level of language development.

This study contributes to the knowledge of using visually based teaching strategies in EFL writing instruction. The findings highlight the nature of PBW and emphasize the importance of considering students' perceptions and proficiency levels when implementing it.

The study finally contributes to the field by proposing the PBWP model, which can be useful as a groundwork for instructional design and future research in EFL writing pedagogy.

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**Transparency:** The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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#### Appendix.

#### Questionnaire for Exploring EFL Learners' Perceptions on Picture-Based Writing

##### Instructions:

This questionnaire aims to understand your perception of picture-based writing and its influence on your writing performance. Please read each statement carefully and choose the option that best matches your opinion.

Use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree  
 2 = Disagree  
 3 = Neutral  
 4 = Agree  
 5 = Strongly Agree

Section 1: Demographic Information						
1. Gender:		<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female				
2. Student ID Number:		.....				
Section 2: Learners' Perspectives on Picture-Based Writing		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Creativity and Idea Generation</b>						
1. Using pictures stimulates my imagination during writing tasks.						
2. Picture prompts help me overcome writer's block.						
3. I feel that pictures allow me to write stories or essays more creatively.						
4. Pictures encourage me to explore new topics or ideas in my writing.						
<b>Coherence and Organization</b>						
5. Picture prompts make it easier for me to write in a logical sequence.						
6. Using pictures helps me connect my ideas better when writing.						
7. Pictures make it simpler to identify the beginning, middle, and end of my writing.						
8. I find it easier to maintain focus on the topic when using picture-based prompts.						
<b>Vocabulary and Descriptive Skills</b>						
9. Pictures help me use more descriptive language in my writing.						
10. Writing with picture prompts encourages me to use more varied vocabulary.						
11. I can better understand and describe different scenarios using pictures.						
12. Pictures help me learn how to use adjectives and adverbs effectively in writing.						
<b>Motivation and Engagement</b>						
13. I enjoy writing tasks more when pictures are included.						
14. Picture-based writing helps me feel more engaged in class activities.						

15. Writing with picture prompts makes me look forward to writing lessons.				
16. Pictures make writing tasks feel less repetitive and boring.				
<b>Confidence in Writing</b>				
17. Pictures make me feel more confident about expressing my ideas in writing.				
18. Picture prompts reduce my anxiety about writing tasks.				
19. Writing based on pictures helps me feel more prepared to complete tasks.				
20. I feel more confident sharing my writing when I use picture-based prompts.				
<b>Critical Thinking and Interpretation</b>				
21. Pictures encourage me to think critically about the topic before writing.				
22. I enjoy interpreting pictures and expressing my understanding in writing.				
23. Using pictures helps me develop unique perspectives in my writing.				
24. Pictures challenge me to make connections between ideas and concepts.				
<b>Learning and Retention</b>				
25. I remember vocabulary and grammar better when using picture-based writing.				
26. Pictures help me recall information from previous lessons when writing.				
27. I feel that picture-based writing has improved my overall writing ability.				
<b>Cultural and Social Awareness</b>				
28. Pictures help me understand different cultures and contexts in writing.				
29. Writing with picture prompts allows me to relate my ideas to real-life situations.				
30. Pictures inspire me to think about global or social issues in my writing.				
<b>Section 3: Open-Ended Questions</b>				
1. In what ways do you feel picture-based writing has helped you improve your writing skills? (Open-ended response)				
2. What challenges do you encounter when using picture-based prompts? (Open-ended response)				
3. How can picture-based writing be improved to better support your learning? (Open-ended response)				

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