

# Thai EFL Learners' Attitudes toward Using a Comic Strip Task to Facilitate Narrative Writing and Their Problems in Narrative Writing

## ทัศนคติของนักศึกษาชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่มีต่อการใช้กิจกรรมการ์ตูนช่องในการเสริมทักษะการเขียนเล่าเรื่องและปัญหาในการเขียนเล่าเรื่อง

Mana Termjai<sup>1</sup>มานะ เต็มใจ<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

This research aimed to investigate 1) Thai EFL learners' attitudes to using a comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing, 2) their reflections on this task, and 3) problems facing them in narrative writing. The participants were 45 second-year English major students. The instruments were a comic strip task and questionnaires. The results showed that 1) the students agreed with the application of this task in narrative writing class, 2) they reflected many benefits of this task to their narrative writing skills, English language skills, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and attitudes to learning English, and 3) although this task helped ease their narrative writing, they were still faced with considerable difficulty with English writing skills.

**Keywords:** Narrative Writing, Comic Strips, Attitudes, Writing Problems

### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษา 1) ทัศนคติของผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่มีต่อการนำกิจกรรมการ์ตูนช่องมาใช้ในชั้นเรียนการเขียนเล่าเรื่องภาษาอังกฤษ 2) ความเห็นของผู้เรียนที่มีต่อกิจกรรมนี้ และ 3) ปัญหาของผู้เรียนในการเขียนเล่าเรื่อง ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยได้แก่ นิสิตระดับปริญญาตรี ชั้นปีที่ 2 สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ จำนวน 45 คน เครื่องมือการวิจัยได้แก่ กิจกรรมการ์ตูนช่องและแบบสอบถาม ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) ผู้เรียนเห็นด้วยกับการนำกิจกรรมการ์ตูนช่องมาใช้ในชั้นเรียนการเขียนเล่าเรื่องภาษาอังกฤษ 2) ผู้เรียนเห็นว่ากิจกรรมนี้สามารถช่วยเสริมสร้างทักษะการเขียนเล่าเรื่อง ทักษะภาษาอังกฤษ ทักษะแห่งศตวรรษที่ 21 และทัศนคติที่ดีในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ และ 3) แม้ว่าการใช้กิจกรรมนี้จะมีผลช่วยเสริมสร้างทักษะการเขียนเล่าเรื่องก็ตาม แต่ผู้เรียนก็ยังประสบปัญหาหลายประการเกี่ยวกับทักษะการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ

**คำสำคัญ:** การเขียนเล่าเรื่อง การ์ตูนช่อง ทัศนคติ ปัญหาในการเขียน

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University

<sup>2</sup> อาจารย์ ภาควิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร



## Introduction

Narration has always been a pervasive form of communication in society (Folse, Muchmore-Vokoun, & Solomon, 2010). As defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary, narrative is “a story or a description of a series of events.” Through narrative writing, writers are narrating in detail something that has happened in the order in which they happened (Langan, 2014, p. 204). Telling stories typically involves narrating a personal experience, which could range widely from describing a past excursion, giving an account of a childhood memory, and explaining a particular event that influenced an individual's current personality (Folse & Pugh, 2010).

As far as academic writing is concerned, however, narrative writing is not as simple as everyday storytelling, as it demands to incorporate certain important elements when writing a story: characters, setting, plot, theme, and mood (Folse et al., 2010). It also requires writers to provide precise details to explain, support, and embellish the story in their narrative writing (Suwannasom, 2017). As a result, it may be difficult for novice writers to be able to describe main characters clearly, describe a setting vividly, and sequence the events in the story chronologically in order to make their narrative engaging and captivating.

In Thailand, English is taught as a foreign language in primary, secondary, and higher education, but many Thai students have still been faced with problems in English writing, especially narrative writing (Rattanadilok Na Phuket & Othman, 2015; Sutthirit, 2016). They typically make a large number of errors when writing narratives (Bosuwon, 2014), and, besides, they generally find organizing and structuring ideas in academic writing the most problematic (Demetriades, 2002).

In an attempt to teach EFL skills, previous research has implemented a comic strip task, as a task-based approach, in the English language classroom. The comic strip task is employed as a teaching approach to develop students' reading and writing skills (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2012; Merç, 2013). The task is also devised to improve students' narrative writing skills (Thongphak, Chaiyasuk & Samdaengdej, 2016; Xu & Liang, 2018). Not only can the task help sharpen students' English language skills, but it can also provide a stimulating learning environment for students to acquire English (Megawati & Anugerahwati, 2012), not to mention creating positive attitudes toward English teaching and learning as a whole (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2012; Thongphak et al., 2016).

Although existing literature has demonstrated positive advantages of implementing the comic strip task to teach English, very few studies have exploited comic strips to specifically facilitate narrative writing of EFL learners (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2012; Xu & Liang, 2018), especially among Thai EFL learners (Thongphak et al., 2016). While the potential benefits comic strips could offer to students have been consistently viewed from the perspective of researchers and educators, little has been known about how exactly students perceive the roles the comic strip task plays in facilitating their narrative writing and what problems they are currently facing in narrative writing.

In order to teach Thai students to properly write a narrative in English, a comic strip task is devised to facilitate their narrative writing. The first research objective aims to investigate Thai EFL learners' attitudes toward using a comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing in these domains: 1) narrative writing skills, 2) English language skills, 3) 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and 4) motivation, interest, and engagement in class. The second aim is to elicit the learners' reflections on this task, based on their practical experience participating in the task. The final research objective is intended to identify problems facing the learners in narrative writing regarding narrative writing skills and English writing skills, based on their written work in this task. The findings, thus, could potentially lend a fresh perspective to teaching narrative writing to Thai students through task-based instruction, particularly the comic strip task.

### Research Questions

1. What are Thai students' attitudes to using a comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing?
2. What are the students' reflections on using a comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing?
3. What problems are the students facing in narrative writing?

### Literature Review

#### 1. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), or task-based instruction (TBI), is an approach which focuses on the learners' completion of the meaningful task and their use of the target language. Through this approach, students are given the opportunity to be in charge of their language control, use the target language in a natural context, be exposed to a wide range of language use, and spend a lot of time communicating in a motivating learning environment (Frost, n.d.).

TBLT also encourages students to become more curious, creative, and collaborative than a traditional textbook lesson, as they are continually engaged in real problem-solving situations, while they are actively interacting with their peers or teacher simultaneously (Superfine, 2010). As Kugamoorthy (2017) claims, TBLT through a wide variety of activities such as group discussions and individual presentations allows students to develop higher order thinking skills such as critical thinking, analytical thinking, and evaluation skills.

Hashemi, Azizinezhad, and Darvishic (2012) recommend applying TBLT in English class and suggest that teachers: 1) ensure the task difficulty, 2) set a clear goal for each task-based lesson, 3) give students clear directions to performing the task, 4) ensure students' active engagement in the task-based lesson, 5) encourage students' risk taking, 6) ensure students' primary focus on meaning, 7) provide opportunities for focusing on form, and 8) encourage students' self-evaluation of their performance and progress.



On the whole, TBLT not only develops students' language skills but also associates them with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, which refers to a broad set of skills, knowledge, and expertise critically important to student success in work and life at the present day (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, 2016). These skills include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, among others (Stauffer, 2020). Also, TBLT helps enhance students' motivation, interest, and engagement in class.

## 2. Using Comic Strips in the English Language Classroom

Among various strategies employing TBLT for increasing EFL learners' English writing skills is the use of comic strips in the English language classroom. A comic strip, as Kunzle (2017) defines, is a series of interrelated drawn pictures specifically devised to be read as a narrative or a chronological sequence either with or without texts in balloons inside the picture frames. Past research has indicated the important pedagogical implications of the application of comics in the EFL contexts. First of all, comic strips as a teaching aid could be applied to develop learners' reading and writing skills. For instance, Kılıçkaya and Krajka (2012) found that the comic strip task relying on a comic strip creation website could particularly benefit not only students' writing but also reading skills. Similarly, Merç (2013) found significant effects of the comic strips accompanying reading passages on students' reading comprehension and summary writing skills, regardless of students' proficiency and text level.

In addition to general English language skills, comics could be designed to specifically improve EFL learners' narrative writing skills. Xu and Liang (2018), for instance, suggested significant effects of graphic novel prompts on students' narrative essay writing in terms of content, development, organization, and convention, compared with their writing with textual narrative writing prompts. Likewise, Thongphak et al. (2016) argued that comic strips could elicit students' narrative writing of higher quality in terms of 1) the use of adverbs of time and conjunctions, 2) the effective description of characters and setting, 3) the use of simple past tense, 4) the summary of the story, and 5) the use of greater variety of vocabulary.

It should also be noted that the application of comics in class can help students develop not only their English reading and writing skills, but it can also create positive attitudes toward English language teaching and learning as a whole (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2012; Thongphak et al., 2016).

## 3. Thai EFL Learner Errors in Writing

Prior studies have constantly investigated Thai EFL learner errors and sources of errors in many different types of writing, e.g. narrative (Cho, 2019), descriptive (Khumphee & Yodkamlue, 2017), expository (Pongsukvajchakul, 2019), general English writing (Sermsook, Liamnimitr, & Pochakorn, 2017), and written information on a tourism website (Kongkaew & Cedar, 2018).

Existing literature has consistently reflected a large number of errors and a vast variety of error types in students' writing. Rattanadilok Na Phuket and Othman (2015), for instance, found that the most frequent types of errors in narrative essays were literal translation of Thai words, word choice, verb tense, preposition, and comma. Sutthirit's (2016) investigation into students' narrative paragraphs revealed three major types of errors: grammar (63.73%), text (29.88%), and discourse (6.39%).

The learner errors in writing were reportedly attributed to various sources, the most dominant of which was learners' first language (L1) interference (Na-ngam, 2005; Rattanadilok Na Phuket & Othman, 2015; Sutthirit, 2016). Additionally, the errors were largely derived from many other different sources such as intralingual interference, inadequate competence of the English language, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rule restrictions (Sutthirit, 2016), false concept hypothesis, avoidance strategy, and carelessness (Na-ngam, 2005). Besides, certain types or errors were found to be directly affected by writing prompts (Cho, 2019) and writing genres (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013).

Thai students' difficulty in writing English has been firmly corroborated from the viewpoint of both students and teachers. According to Demetriades (2002), Thai students admittedly had major difficulty with grammar, text organization, and vocabulary. As Bosuwon (2014) claims, instructors agreed that students usually made a wide array of errors, especially articles, verb tense, run-on sentence, fragment, and subject-verb agreement. Accordingly, they unanimously agreed that almost all the errors were deemed to be corrected immediately or as soon as possible regardless how frequently they occurred and how serious they were considered, i.e. global or local errors.

In an attempt to teach Thai students to properly write a narrative in English, a comic strip task was devised specifically to facilitate their narrative writing. This research, therefore, aimed at investigating Thai students' attitudes to the implementation of the comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing in four domains: 1) narrative writing skills, 2) English language skills, 3) 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (i.e. analytical thinking, creative thinking, and collaboration), and 4) motivation, interest, and engagement in class. It was also aimed at eliciting their reflections on this task and identifying problems facing them in narrative writing in two domains: 1) narrative writing skills (i.e. character, setting, and plot), and 2) English writing skills (i.e. vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics).

## **Methods**

### **1. Participants**

Forty-five second-year English major students who enrolled in the Essay Writing course in the second semester of the academic year 2019 at a government university in the lower northern region of Thailand were recruited in this research, using convenience sampling. Prior to taking



this course, they had completed some compulsory courses necessary for English writing practice, including English Grammar, Basic Writing, and Paragraph Writing. This educational background indicates that they had continuously acquainted themselves with fundamental writing skills before taking part in this research.

## 2. Instruments

There were two instruments used in this study. The first instrument was a comic strip task, and the other was a questionnaire.

### 2.1 Comic Strip Task

The comic strip task required students to work in a group of four sitting in a circle, each of whom had a pencil and a four-frame A4-size paper (see figure below). At first, everyone was asked to draw a picture of literally anything that came to mind in Frame 1 on the paper in two minutes. Then each student passed their own paper to another member sitting next to them on the right side.

Again, they were asked to draw any picture on Frame 2 on the paper in two minutes and passed the paper to the next member on the right. Then they were asked to repeat these steps for Frame 3 and Frame 4. Once finishing drawing the last picture on Frame 4, they passed on the paper to the next member on the right, i.e. the one who drew the picture on Frame 1.

Based on the comic strip at hand, each student was asked to write a narrative paragraph of 130-150 words in 30 minutes, using their own creativity and imagination. In the meantime, they were explicitly informed of fundamental elements of narrative writing. Once completing their narrative paragraph, they submitted it to the researcher for further analysis (Research Objective 3).

Frame 1	Frame 2
Frame 3	Frame 4

Comic strip task: four-frame paper

### 2.2 Questionnaire

A self-constructed questionnaire, primarily based on review of the existing literature, was devised and aimed at investigating the participants' attitudes toward using the

comic strip task to facilitate their narrative writing (Research Objective 1) and eliciting their reflections on this task (Research Objective 2). The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part I collected general information of the respondents. Part II sought the respondents' attitudes toward using the comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing, by using a five-point Likert scale: 5 means "strongly agree"; 4 means "agree"; 3 means "neutral"; 2 means "disagree"; and 1 means "strongly disagree." Lastly, Part III elicited the respondents' reflections on the task, by using an open-ended question.

### **3. Data Collection**

The participants were initially informed of the research title, objectives, methods, and benefits of the research before they were distributed "Information Sheet for Research Participants" for their perusal, together with "Informed Consent Form" for them to sign. Then the comic strip task was implemented, which took about 50 minutes, including initial instructions. Having finished the task, the participants were distributed the questionnaires to complete. Lastly, the questionnaires together with students' comic strips and their written work were collected for further analysis.

### **4. Data Analysis**

First of all, data on the respondents' attitudes toward the comic strip task were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, based on this criterion for the mean: 4.51-5.00 means "strongly agree"; 3.51-4.50 means "agree"; 2.51-3.50 means "neutral"; 1.51-2.50 means "disagree"; and 1.00-1.50 means "strongly disagree."

Next, criteria were identified for the respondents' reflection on the comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing in four domains: 1) narrative writing skills, 2) English language skills, 3) 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and 4) motivation, interest, and engagement in class. Another set of criteria was identified for problems facing the respondents in narrative writing in two domains: 1) narrative writing skills, i.e. character, setting, and plot, and 2) English writing skills, i.e. vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Using frequency and percentage, the data were then assessed under these criteria by the researcher on two different occasions, one week apart, in order to obtain intra-rater reliability.

In combination with error classification in previous studies, the framework for error analysis was adapted from Na-ngam's (2005) error taxonomy, which consisted of 23 types of grammatical errors, e.g. incomplete sentences, run-on sentences, word order, there-be, and tenses, to name but a few.

## **Findings**

### **1. Learners' Attitudes toward the Comic Strip Task**

The first research objective was to investigate Thai EFL learners' attitudes toward using the comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing. The analysis of the participants' response to the



questionnaires showed that overall the participants agreed that the comic strip task could help facilitate their narrative writing ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ). Table 1 demonstrates the participants' attitudes toward the role the comic strip task plays in four domains.

It can be seen that 21<sup>st</sup> century skills were the skills the participants mostly agreed that they could develop through the task ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 0.31$ ). Secondly, they agreed that the task could help reinforce their motivation, interest, and engagement in learning English in class ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.16$ ). Thirdly, they agreed that the task could facilitate their narrative writing skills ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 0.15$ ). Lastly, although they were neutral that they could improve English language skills through the task ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ), they agreed that they could develop their writing skills through the task ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ).

Table 1 Learners' attitudes toward the comic strip task

Statements	M	SD	Degree
<b>Narrative Writing Skills</b>			
1. The comic strip task enables me to write the narrative more effectively.	3.80	0.63	Agree
2. The comic strip task enables me to describe the characters more effectively.	3.78	0.74	Agree
3. The comic strip task enables me to describe the setting more effectively.	3.98	0.78	Agree
4. The comic strip task enables me to connect the events in the story more effectively.	4.09	0.97	Agree
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>English Language Skills</b>			
5. I can improve my writing skills through the comic strip task.	3.96	0.71	Agree
6. I can improve my vocabulary skills through the comic strip task.	3.31	0.70	Neutral
7. I can improve my grammar skills through the comic strip task.	3.20	0.84	Neutral
8. I can improve my punctuation and spelling skills through the comic strip task.	3.44	0.92	Neutral
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills</b>			
9. I can practice my analytical thinking skills through the comic strip task.	4.27	0.62	Agree
10. I can practice my creative thinking skills through the comic strip task.	4.76	0.43	Strongly Agree



11. The comic strip task encourages my collaboration skills with peers in class.	4.20	0.79	Agree
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Motivation, Interest, and Engagement in Class</b>			
12. The comic strip task motivates me to learn English in class.	4.13	0.84	Agree
13. The comic strip task enhances my interest in English learning in class.	4.09	0.79	Agree
14. The comic strip task enhances my engagement in English learning in class.	4.38	0.81	Agree
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>4.20</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.96</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>Agree</b>

## 2. Learners' Reflections on the Comic Strip Task

The second research objective was to elicit the learners' reflections on the comic strip task. Thematic analysis of the data indicated how this task could help facilitate narrative writing in four domains: 1) narrative writing skills, 2) English language skills, 3) 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and 4) motivation, interest, and engagement in class. Table 2 showed, first of all, 60% of the participants reflected that this task reinforced their motivation, interest, and engagement in class. Almost half (46.67%) of them reported that this task could develop their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, while 40% of them stated that it could facilitate their narrative writing skills. Lastly, 22.22% of them mentioned that this task allowed them to strengthen their English language skills.

Table 2 Learners' reflections on the comic strip task

Domains	No. of Learners	%
1. Narrative Writing Skills	18	40
2. English Language Skills	10	22.22
3. 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skills	21	46.67
4. Motivation, Interest, and Engagement in Class	27	60

To illustrate, the comic strip task was seen to not only allow students to facilitate their narrative writing skills but also strengthen their English language skills, develop higher order thinking skills, and provide a favorable learning environment in class, as clearly articulated in the samples of students' utterances below.

"The comic strip task is fun, and it enables students to develop creative thinking, to connect the sequence of events, and to analyze a story plot. It also hones vocabulary skills." (Student No. 24)



"The comic strip task is an activity that can promote the English language. It helps avoid boring lessons in the classroom and also enables students to improve English skills by narrating a story in English through the pictures and imagination. It helps develop writing skills as well." (Student No. 31)

Although nearly all the participants had evidently positive opinions on the comic strip task, five participants (11.11%) were concerned that the time of the task was rather short. Additionally, four participants (8.89%) admitted that they had difficulty relating the four-frame pictures and creating a single unified story, while a couple (4.44%) found it particularly difficult to write a story due to their limited vocabulary. The students' concern over the implementation of this task is illustrated below.

"The time is not enough." (Student No. 34)

"It's sometimes hard when I have to relate the pictures together and create the story." (Student No. 6)

"It's hard to explain the details because of the limited vocabulary." (Student No. 36)

### **3. Problems Facing Learners in Narrative Writing**

The final research objective was to identify problems facing the learners when writing narratives in English. The problems were classified into two major domains: 1) narrative writing skills and 2) English writing skills, which were demonstrated in detail as follows.

#### **3.1 Problems regarding Narrative Writing Skills**

The examination of the participants' written work based on their own comic strips was intended to identify whether they were able to successfully incorporate fundamental elements of narratives in their writing, i.e. character, setting, and plot. When writing narratives, writers were typically supposed to describe main characters, describe a setting, and connect the events in chronological order. The results showed that all the participants had no difficulty describing main characters, while five participants (11.11%) failed to describe a setting, and four participants (8.89%) failed to create a complete plot, i.e. they were unable to completely narrate a story from the beginning until the end of the story, or from the first-frame picture until the last one.

#### **3.2 Problems regarding English Writing Skills**

Problems regarding English writing skills were further classified into two major domains: 1) vocabulary and grammar and 2) mechanics, as demonstrated as follows.

##### **3.2.1 Problems regarding Vocabulary and Grammar**

The detailed analysis of problems regarding vocabulary and grammar revealed that the participants committed 670 errors, which could be classified into 12 main types of errors. Table 3 indicates that verb tense ranked as the most frequent erroneous type, and this type alone accounted for almost half of the total number of errors (44.93%). This was followed by errors in article (12.09%), preposition (7.46%), verb form (4.48%), plural (4.18%), run-on sentence and

comma splice (3.88%), subject-verb agreement (3.88%), part of speech (3.58%), omission of verb (2.54%), passive voice (1.49%), and word usage (1.49%). Lastly, the “Others” type included 17 other subtypes of errors (10%), i.e. sentence fragment, possessive, adverb, adjective, relative clause, unparallel structure, pronoun, “be” overgeneralization, auxiliary verb, modal, noun clause, double negative, conjunction, adjective of quantity, “there-be” construction, sentence-initial “have construction, and use of Thai word for English word. The five most frequent types of errors were further demonstrated and exemplified below.

Table 3 Problems regarding vocabulary and grammar

Types of Errors	No. of Errors	%
1. Verb tense	301	44.93
2. Article	81	12.09
3. Preposition	50	7.46
4. Verb form	30	4.48
5. Plural	28	4.18
6. Run-on sentence and comma splice	26	3.88
7. Subject-verb agreement	26	3.88
8. Part of speech	24	3.58
9. Omission of verb	17	2.54
10. Passive voice	10	1.49
11. Word usage	10	1.49
12. Others	67	10.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

1) **Verb tense:** This error occurred when students used the wrong verb tense in their narratives. As in the example below, the phrase “Once upon a time,” which was used at the beginning of the story, indicated that something happened a long time ago or in an imaginary world. While the past tense should be used here, the present tense was incorrectly used instead, as underlined.

\*Once upon a time, there is a guy named Tommy. He is the faceless boy who comes out from nowhere and wandering everywhere. He wishes some day he would have his own face so he can express his emotions like the others.



**2) Article:** This error occurred in various circumstances. Oftentimes, the wrong articles were used, i.e. definite instead of indefinite articles, and vice versa. Occasionally, articles were omitted where they must be used, and vice versa. Also, the indefinite article “a” was incorrectly used before a singular noun beginning with a vowel sound, and “an” was incorrectly used before a singular noun beginning with a consonant sound. The following example illustrates the omission of articles, as indicated in the parentheses.

\*John have 2 pet. The first one is (a) dog, and the second one is (a) cat. They live in their life seem happy. One day, He go to (a) forest by car to set a picnic camp.

**3) Preposition:** This error occurred when the wrong preposition was used and also when the preposition was omitted where it must be used, and vice versa. The following statement exemplifies the omission of preposition “to,” as indicated in the parentheses.

\*Last weekend, I woke up early preparing to go (to) the flowers shop.

**4) Verb form:** This error occurred when the verb took the wrong verb form. In the following example, the verb “went” requires the gerund “jogging” instead of “to jogging.”

\*Next day, I went to jogging in the park; nearly my hotel.

**5) Plural:** This error frequently occurred when students omitted the plural form of plural nouns, such as -s or -es. Occasionally, the plural form was used where it was not required, and the irregular plural form was incorrectly used instead of regular plural form, such as “humen” instead of “humans.” The following statement exemplifies the omission of plural form, i.e. “many skill” and the overuse of plural form, i.e. “for examples.”

\*It have many skill, for examples, it can jump from high, it can stand with 2 legs, and many skill that another cat no have.

### 3.2.2 Problems regarding Mechanics

The examination of problems regarding mechanics revealed that the participants committed 177 mechanical errors. The most frequent type of errors was punctuation (45.76%), followed by spelling (33.90%) and capitalization (20.34%).

## Discussion

### 1. Learners' Attitudes toward the Comic Strip Task

The first research question investigates Thai EFL learners' attitudes toward exploiting the comic strip task to facilitate narrative writing. The results indicate that the students generally agreed that the comic strip task could bring potential benefits for them in narrative writing in numerous ways. In other words, the task is seen to help students develop their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and reinforce their motivation, interest, and engagement in learning English in class. Due to its practical advantages, the task is also considered to enable students to write narratives effectually and improve their English writing skills concurrently.

The findings in the present research strongly agree with the existing research on the application of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and comic strip task in the classroom. For instance, Kugamoorthy (2017) argues that TBLT through an extensive range of activities offers students with considerable opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, analytical thinking, and evaluative thinking skills. Superfine (2010) maintains that TBLT motivates students to become more curious, creative, and collaborative than a traditional textbook lesson, as students are constantly engaged in real problem-solving situations. Additionally, Thongphak et al. (2016) contend that students have favorable attitudes to learning English with comic strips. Megawati and Anugerahwati (2012) claim that comic strips encourage students to learn to write narratives as they illustrate content, organization, and language in attractive forms. Also, Kılıçkaya and Krajka (2012) suggest that comic strips can be used as a teaching aid to encourage students to practice grammar and sentence writing they have learned earlier.

Although the participants in the present research agreed that they could improve their English writing skills through the comic strip task, they were neutral about the advantages of using the task to improve their vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. While it may be true that the task does not primarily teach such particular points, it is undeniable that the act of writing narratives in English based on the comic strips at hand evidently encourages students to gain hands-on experience in using English to narrate a story in an authentic way, which consequently develop these language skills to some extent.

It is worth noting that students' English language skills are highly likely to improve through regular practice under a teacher's guidance over a reasonable period of time. As Thongphak et al. (2016) claim, students significantly improved their English writing skills, e.g. spelling, vocabulary, adverbs of time, conjunctions, and simple past tense, over six-week classes with a comic strip task. According to Kılıçkaya and Krajka (2012), students practicing grammar and sentence writing through a comic strip task over a five-week period created longer written texts with greater structural complexity and variety than when they normally did in a traditional writing practice. Thus, students are more likely to make the most of the comic strip task if they receive constructive feedback on their writing and are given the opportunity to revise the first draft of their writing.

## **2. Learners' Reflections on the Comic Strip Task**

The second research question elicits the learners' reflections on the comic strip task. Thematic analysis of students' opinion reflects positive viewpoints of most of the students. To illustrate, 60% of the students considered the comic strip task to be beneficial to increase their motivation, interest, and engagement in class. Additionally, 46.67% of them stated that the task provided suitable opportunities to strengthen their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. It should also be noted that 40% of the students perceived the task to be helpful in enhancing their narrative writing skills.



Besides, 22.22% of them mentioned that the task helped increase their English language skills. Evidently, the comic strip task initially requests students to independently create the comic strips in close collaboration with their group members and consequently requires them to individually write a narrative based on the complete comic strips. This learning and practicing process inevitably involves students in learning a great deal simultaneously during the task. Obviously, the students' reflections on the advantages of the comic strip task firmly corroborate their own attitudes stated above.

Despite the aforementioned high opinions on the implementation of the task, some students express their concern about certain matters. To be more specific, five students (11.11%) felt that the time of the activity was rather limited. As a result, some students may be unable to manage to finish the task in time. As Kugamoorthy (2017) suggests, allocating insufficient learning time, among other factors, can hinder fully effective engagement of students in class. Nevertheless, setting effective time limits can help reduce a tendency to procrastinate and concurrently increase productivity ("Deadlines," n.d.).

Furthermore, four students (8.89%) had difficulties in relating the four-frame pictures to create a single unified story, while a couple (4.44%) found it especially difficult to write a narrative due to their limited vocabulary. According to Cho (2019), linguistic and behavioral influences of writing prompts can significantly affect second language writing performance. In this particular case, the comic strip task as a narrating prompt may cause a certain degree of difficulty in connecting four separate pictures to create a coherent short story. As Demetriades (2002) indicates, Thai students admittedly have serious difficulty in organizing and structuring ideas as well as using specialized vocabulary and idiomatic phrases appropriately. It is thus noteworthy that teachers should ensure that the task difficulty is suitable for students (Hashemi et al., 2012). In fact, all the participants in this research are English majors, who have previously completed some compulsory writing courses, i.e. English Grammar, Basic Writing, and Paragraph Writing. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the comic strip task suits their academic background.

### **3. Problems Facing Learners in Narrative Writing**

The final research question explores difficulties confronting the learners when writing narratives. The textual analysis indicates that the majority of the students are able to write narratives appropriately. In other words, all students could introduce and describe the characters in the comic strips clearly. All but four students were able to completely narrate a story from the beginning until the end of the story. It may be feasible for those who failed to finish the story to complete the writing task with the extra time. Besides, all except five students were able to describe the setting in which the story took place. Undoubtedly, those who failed to describe the setting can be encouraged to revise their written work and include this core element in the story if time

permits. It could be presumed that the comic strips, typically with vivid pictures shown in chronological sequence, enable students to properly incorporate essential elements of narratives in their writing.

Although most of the students have no complicated problems pertaining to narrative writing skills, they apparently encounter considerable difficulty regarding English writing skills. To demonstrate, the students committed up to 670 errors in grammar and vocabulary, which consisted of errors in verb tense (44.93%), article (12.09%), preposition (7.46%), verb form (4.48%), plural (4.18%), run-on sentence and comma splice (3.88%), subject-verb agreement (3.88%), part of speech (3.58%), omission of verb (2.54%), passive voice (1.49%), word usage (1.49%), and 17 other error subtypes (10%). On the other hand, they committed 177 errors regarding mechanics: punctuation (45.76%), spelling (33.90%), and capitalization (20.34%).

These findings evidently correspond with previous studies on writing errors in narrative writing committed by Thai EFL learners. For instance, Rattanadilok Na Phuket and Othman (2015) found numerous types of errors in Thai students' narrative essays, the most frequent of which were literal translation of Thai words, word choice, verb tense, preposition, and comma. Similarly, Sutthirit (2016) found that grammatical errors were the most frequent types of errors, which accounted for over one half of the total errors in narrative paragraphs written by Thai students. Additionally, Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) found that the most pervasive types of errors in three different types of texts including narration were verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, preposition, and modal/auxiliary. In a similar way, Na-ngam (2005) discovered common grammatical errors Thai students frequently committed in four different text types including narrative paragraphs: incomplete sentences, tenses, agreement, nouns, articles, and spelling.

Thai EFL learner errors in writing are attributable to various sources, the most dominant of which is L1 interference (e.g. Rattanadilok Na Phuket & Othman, 2015; Sermsook et al., 2017; Sutthirit, 2016). The five most common errors caused by L1 interference are plural form of nouns, omission of punctuation, wrong structures of complex sentences, omission of some parts of a sentence, and fragments (Khumphee & Yodkamlue, 2017). In addition to L1 interference, learner errors are largely derived from other sources, such as intralingual interference, limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and carelessness of students (Sermsook et al., 2017). Oftentimes, errors partly result from learners' overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, and incomplete application of rules (Pongsukvajchakul, 2019; Sutthirit, 2016). On top of that, certain types of errors are found to be directly affected by writing genres (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). Overall, it is clear that inadequate English writing skills are a pressing issue for many Thai students.

Through this classroom-based research, there are a few major challenges while implementing the comic strip task in class. The first challenge is to ensure the task difficulty suits



students' educational background, e.g. their academic discipline and English language proficiency. Despite being second-year English major students who previously completed writing-related courses such as English Grammar, Basic Writing, and Paragraph Writing, some participants in this research nonetheless found it rather difficult to complete a short narrative in a limited time, relate the pictures in order to create a single unified story, and choose appropriate vocabulary to tell a story, according to the analysis of students' reflections on the task and that of their written narrative.

The other main challenge is to ensure students' active engagement in the task and accommodate their diverse learning styles. As English major students, the participants seemed to be actively engaged in the comic strip task throughout the implementation of the task. However, some individuals might not be quite familiar with this particular learning style that encourages students' hands-on experience, creative thinking, and analytical thinking, and they thus might find this task overwhelming or even stressful to a certain degree. Therefore, it is necessary that instructors who apply this task in class utilize appropriate teaching strategies in order to maintain student interest and engagement during the task.

This research, however, is subject to certain limitations. As this study collected data from questionnaires and narratives written by 45 Thai students employing convenience sampling, this sample size was too small to be considered representative of all Thai EFL learners, and the statistical findings might not be generalizable. Additionally, this insufficient sample size could impact the overall results and conclusions drawn from the research.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the perspectives of the Thai students under investigation, the comic strip task is clearly seen to help facilitate narrative writing in English. Thus, teachers interested in applying TBLT may consider exploiting the comic strip task to give comprehensive instruction in narrative writing, which not only reinforces the skill set students need to acquire in the present day and age but also creates a really pleasant and stimulating classroom environment, not to mention actively involving students in honing their English language skills, especially grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Upon completion of the task, teachers are also able to analyze students' written work to identify strengths and weaknesses of their narrative writing skills as well as English language skills. Afterward, teachers can provide relevant feedback on students' writing so that they can learn from their mistakes and improve their performance on the next occasion. In order to make the most of comic strip task in class, however, it is necessary that teachers consider adapting the task to students' English proficiency and establishing an appropriate time for the task as well.



Further research may investigate practical applications of the comic strip task to other types of writing such as descriptive, by adapting comics to help students develop their descriptive language skills. It may also explore the extent to which the task encourages students to describe the subject in question more effectively. Besides promoting writing skills, the comic strip task may also be applied to develop students' oral narrative skills. Further studies, thus, may examine the extent to which the task can improve students' narrative as well as English communicative competence.

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