

Comic Strip Writing Errors in Simple Past and Past Continuous Tenses in Veterinary Students

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates grammatical errors in the use of Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses among veterinary vocational students in comic strip writing tasks. While previous studies have extensively documented tense-aspect acquisition in general English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and the use of comics as instructional aids, there is limited research on the actual linguistic output of vocational students in specific professional domains. Veterinary students represent a unique population as they must integrate specialized technical knowledge with grammatical accuracy to convey professional narratives, yet their specific linguistic production patterns remain under-explored. Comic strips deserve investigation because their multimodal design provides a contextualized and cognitively supportive medium for language production. This study fills a research gap by qualitatively analyzing how veterinary English as Specific Purposes (ESP) students apply past tenses in authentic vocational scenarios rather than in isolated tests. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the data were analyzed using Ellis's (1994) procedural framework for Error Analysis, involving the collection, identification, description, explanation, and evaluation of errors. Analysis of approximately 60 comic strips revealed a high degree of grammatical accuracy, with only a limited frequency of errors. Tense inconsistency, particularly the shift between past and present forms within the same narrative, emerged as the most dominant pattern, followed by minor confusion in verb form selection and question formation. The results suggest that the multimodal scaffolding inherent in comic strips facilitates meaningful and accurate language use, effectively reducing cognitive load for ESP learners. Consequently, the study recommends that ESP pedagogy prioritize contextualized multimodal tasks over isolated rule memorization to enhance grammatical competence in professional settings.

Keywords: error analysis, simple past tense, past continuous tense, comic strip writing, ESP learners

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Introduction

Grammatical competence serves as the foundation for effective communication (Sari & Avifah, 2023) as it enables learners to construct meaningful and accurate sentences in both spoken and written contexts. It encompasses knowledge of linguistic forms, including syntax, morphology, and the appropriate use of grammatical structures, which are essential for conveying precise meanings. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, mastery of grammatical features, particularly tenses, is crucial for expressing temporal relationships, sequencing events, and maintaining coherence in discourse. The ability to distinguish between completed actions and ongoing processes plays a significant role in narrative writing, where clarity of time reference directly affects comprehensibility.

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However, despite formal instruction, many learners in Indonesia struggle to apply grammatical rules consistently in actual language use. This difficulty often reflects a gap between learners' declarative knowledge of grammar rules and their procedural ability to use them in meaningful communication as Indonesian and English has different tenses rules. This also occurred in Amirian & Sadeghi (2012)'s study, when learners engage in meaning-focused tasks, they may acquire L2 grammar in a way that fosters declarative rather than procedural knowledge. As a result, learners frequently produce systematic errors, especially when engaging in contextualized and meaning-focused tasks. These errors are not merely random mistakes but are indicative of learners' developing interlanguage, representing their current stage of language acquisition (Amirian & Sadeghi, 2012; Róg, 2025). In some communicative contexts, learners may prioritize message comprehensibility and use communication strategies that allow them to bypass the need for grammatical accuracy (Lyster, 2004). This tendency can lead to a "levelling-off" or plateau effect in grammatical development, where learners maintain stable but error-prone interlanguage forms because their communicative strategies effectively circumvent the need for more complex or accurate structures (Lyster, 2004).

In this regard, Error Analysis (EA) provides a systematic framework for examining such learner errors in order to understand the underlying processes of second language development (Gazıoğlu & Aydın, 2024; Muftah, 2023; Sarkar, 2026). By identifying, classifying, and interpreting errors, EA enables researchers to reveal patterns of difficulty and areas of incomplete learning, particularly in the use of grammatical structures such as tense and aspect. Therefore, analyzing learners' errors in specific contexts, such as narrative or dialogue-based writing, is essential for gaining deeper insight into their grammatical competence and for informing more effective instructional practices.

Further, Simple Past Tense remains one of the most error-prone grammatical structures for EFL learners. According to Fanny et al. (2022), EFL students commonly make errors related to using the Simple Past Tense in writing tasks, with misformation being the most dominant error type, accounting for up to 81% of all tense-related errors, followed by addition, omission, and misordering. This pattern is consistently confirmed across different learner populations. A study of thirty-one Senior High School students found 128 total errors, predominantly misformation errors, concluding that students have low awareness of using verbs in the Simple Past Tense while writing. Similarly, a study involving 15 students of XI MIPA 1 found 92 errors in narrative texts, with misformation at 44%, omission at 34%, addition at 15%, and misordering at 7%, indicating that even higher-performing students still produce significant tense errors (Nahak et al., 2024; Seruni, 2023). Studies in recount text writing further reinforce these findings. An analysis of students' writing compositions in Simple Past Tense revealed that grammar errors were the most prevalent, with verb errors specifically

accounting for 24.56% of all grammar-related errors. At the university level, research into students' final academic writing found four kinds of errors: omission (13%), addition (5%), misformation (31%), and misordering (5%) with misformation of irregular past verbs being the most frequent problem (Fitria, 2020; Setyaningrum, 2018).

Research comparing Simple Past and Past Continuous performance reveals a consistent pattern of greater difficulty with the continuous form. A study analyzing past tense errors found that student performance in the Simple Past Tense was better than in the Past Continuous Tense, with none of the students achieving an excellent score on the past continuous test, whereas the majority fell between pass and good levels (Mergani & Aidaroos, 2015). This difficulty is also quantified in controlled grammar assessments: the most common errors made by students were in the Simple Past Tense (61.5%), followed by past progressive third person singular (53.8%), while in cloze test conditions, the highest percentage of errors was found in the Past Continuous "I" form (92.3%), followed by past continuous singular (69.2%). These findings suggest that the interaction between aspect and tense, particularly the progressive aspect, poses a substantially greater challenge than simple past morphology alone (Samad, 2022).

Meanwhile, comic strips have been increasingly validated as a productive EFL writing medium. Comic strips can be used in multiple ways to promote different skill sets, including grammar and vocabulary through fill-in-the-blank exercises, analytical skills through jigsaw tasks, and creativity through original comic creation; they also provide authentic material depicting how grammar is used in actual conversation, as opposed to decontextualized sentences (Drolet, 2010). Empirical studies support their effectiveness. Research on web-based comic strip creation tools found promising results for EFL learners' grammar and sentence writing, while also recommending further research to compare learner-generated and premade comic strips across a wider range of grammar activities. In the Indonesian EFL context specifically, a classroom action research study on comic strips for teaching narrative writing found them effective for presenting content, organization, and grammatical aspects of narrative texts, recommending implementation across other genres and countries (Kıçıkaya & Krajka, 2012; Megawati & Anugerahwati, 2012). Regarding tense practice specifically, research confirms that comic strips allow students to practice different verb tenses such as changing present tense to past or future, and that comic strips as pedagogical visualized cues help students comprehend grammatical material more straightforwardly and effectively (Wijaya et al., 2021).

Another study has also highlighted the effectiveness of comic strips as a medium for teaching writing in EFL contexts. For instance, a study conducted by Mualifah & Wahidiyati (2025) in seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Mrebet, Purbalingga found that the implementation of comics followed three pedagogical stages; exploration, elaboration, and confirmation; which supported student-centred learning and improved

writing performance. The findings showed that comics helped students understand dialogue structure, develop ideas, and engage more actively in the writing process through visual and contextual support. In addition, the integration of visual and textual elements encouraged creativity and collaboration among students, making writing tasks more meaningful and less intimidating. However, the study also identified several challenges, including students' difficulty in maintaining narrative coherence, imbalance between visual and textual elements, limited teacher expertise in visual pedagogy, and time constraints during implementation. Despite these limitations, the study concluded that comics are a promising instructional medium for enhancing writing skills and learner engagement in EFL classrooms.

Regarding error analysis in Indonesian EFL and vocational contexts, research on Indonesian learners' writing errors consistently highlights tense-related misformation as the dominant error type. Studies on verb errors in EFL writing compositions trace the highest frequency of errors to the present simple (55.4%), followed by the past simple (28.9%), and the present continuous (8.43%), identifying misformation as the primary error type under the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Handayani, 2019). At the vocational level, interest in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts is growing as teaching and learning activities in vocational education is distinct from university context (Pratiwi et al., 2023). Research on vocational high school students emphasizes the need for contextually relevant materials, with e-comic design studies confirming that ESP-oriented comic content is both pedagogically appropriate and highly engaging for vocational learners (Farid et al., 2025).

Based on the reviewed literature, three significant gaps are identified that justify this study. Firstly, no study combines Simple Past and Past Continuous error analysis simultaneously in a single writing task. Most existing studies examine Simple Past Tense errors in isolation (narrative or recount text) or analyse Past Continuous separately. There is a lack of research that investigates how learners manage the interaction between these two tenses, particularly the "while + past continuous / simple past" construction, within a single integrated task. Secondly, comic strip writing tasks are under-researched as a data source for error analysis. The existing body of error analysis research collects data almost exclusively from narrative essays, short stories, or recount texts. Researchers have called for further studies on the impact of learner-generated comic strips in grammar activities. No study to date has used the comic strip writing task itself, with its dialogue-driven, panel-constrained format, as the primary source of grammatical error data. This format produces naturally occurring, spontaneous sentence production quite different from guided essay writing (Kiçikaya & Krajka, 2012). Finally, error analysis in domain-specific (veterinary/health science) EFL learner populations is virtually absent. While one study investigated agriculture students' ability to write past tense (Hayati, 2017), the broader ESP population of science/veterinary/health-track students remains almost entirely unstudied in the

error analysis literature. Students in these programs produce content-embedded language (describing medical procedures, symptoms, animal behavior) that involves specific tense-aspectual demands not present in general narrative writing. This study's focus on veterinary students writing a contextually situated comic strip, integrating both Simple Past and Past Continuous to narrate a medical event, is therefore a novel and necessary contribution to the field.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design using an error analysis approach to investigate students' use of Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses in comic-based dialogue writing. The purpose was to identify, classify, and quantify grammatical errors produced by ESP students when constructing dialogue based on visual prompts. The study followed the Error Analysis (EA) procedure proposed by Ellis (1994), which involves five distinct stages: collection, identification, description, explanation, and evaluation. Initially, a sample of learner language was collected through veterinary-themed comic strip tasks. Following the identification of grammatical deviations in the use of past tenses, the errors were described and classified into patterns such as tense inconsistency and verb-form selection. These patterns were then explained through the lens of grammatical competence, leading to an evaluation of the pedagogical implications for ESP instruction. The research was conducted in a natural classroom setting without experimental manipulation, and all participants completed the same task under similar conditions.

Participants

The participants of this study were 80 students enrolled in the Veterinary Vocational Study Program (Diploma 3) at the Politeknik Pertanian Negeri Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara. The students were first-year learners taking an ESP course designed to support communication skills related to their academic and professional fields. The bachelor students were chosen as ESP course was only taught in the first year. They were selected using a total population sampling technique, in which all students enrolled in the selected class were included in the study. All participants had previously received instruction on basic English grammar, including the use of Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses, as part of their regular English curriculum.

Eligibility criteria for participation included being officially registered in the ESP course, attending the class during the data collection period, and completing the assigned writing task. Of all 80 students, those who did not complete the task or submitted incomplete responses were excluded from the final analysis. The participants represented the accessible population of students in the selected program, and their responses were considered appropriate for examining grammatical performance in ESP-related writing contexts.

Setting and Sampling Procedures

Data were collected during regular classroom sessions conducted as part of the scheduled ESP course. The classroom setting provided a familiar learning environment that allowed students to perform the writing task under normal instructional conditions. The total population sampling method ensured that all students in the class participated in the activity, resulting in a participation rate of 100% of the accessible population. Prior to the data collection process, as the study involved minimal risk and consisted solely of classroom-based writing activities, formal institutional ethics approval was not required. Nevertheless, verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process.

Instrument and Measures

The primary instrument used in this study was a comic-based dialogue writing task designed to elicit students' use of Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses in a contextualized situation. The comic strip consisted of eight sequential panels illustrating a veterinary health scenario involving a dog that appeared weak and required medical attention. As it can be seen in Figure 1 below, the storyline included actions such as observing the dog's condition, checking body temperature using a thermometer, administering treatment, and monitoring the animal's recovery. The visual sequence was intentionally designed to reflect situations relevant to the students' field of veterinary health in order to enhance contextual understanding and engagement.

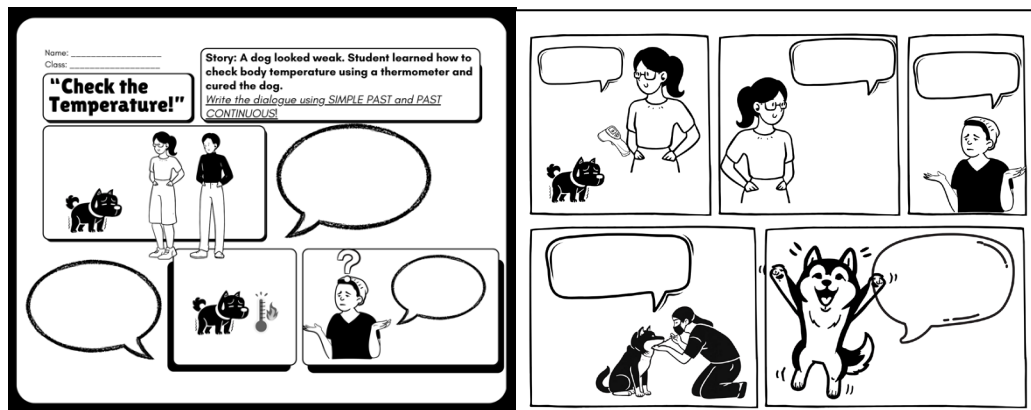


Figure 1. The comic strip

Each panel contained visual cues accompanied by empty speech bubbles that required students to complete the dialogue. Students were instructed to write appropriate sentences inside the speech bubbles by describing past events and ongoing actions based on the storyline. The instruction explicitly required students to use Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses in their responses. The comic format served as a visual stimulus that supported idea generation and reduced cognitive load,

enabling students to focus more on grammatical accuracy rather than content development.

The data collected in this study consisted of students' written dialogue responses produced within the speech bubbles of the comic strip. Each dialogue sentence containing a verb phrase related to past events was considered a unit of analysis. The primary outcome measure in this study was the occurrence of grammatical errors related to tense usage, particularly errors involving Simple Past and Past Continuous forms.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted during a regular English class session. At the beginning of the activity, students were provided with printed copies of the comic strip titled "Check the Temperature!", which consisted of eight panels depicting a sequence of events involving veterinary care for a weak dog. The instructor explained the task instructions clearly and ensured that all students understood the requirements before beginning the activity.

Students were instructed to carefully observe each panel of the comic strip and complete the dialogue by writing appropriate sentences inside the speech bubbles. They were required to describe events that had already occurred and actions that were in progress in the past by using Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses. Students were given approximately 60 minutes to complete the writing task individually. During the activity, dictionaries, textbooks, mobile phones, and other external resources were not permitted to ensure that the responses reflected students' independent grammatical knowledge.

After the allotted time had ended, all completed comic sheets were collected by the instructor. The collected responses were then prepared for analysis by assigning identification codes to each student's work. These coded responses served as the primary data source for subsequent error identification and classification.

Error Identification and Classification

The collected data were analyzed following the Error Analysis (EA) framework proposed by Ellis (1994). After the students completed the comic-based dialogue writing task, all written responses were examined to identify grammatical deviations related to the use of the Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses. The identification process focused on detecting instances where students failed to apply the target grammatical structures accurately within the context of narrative dialogue.

Following identification, the errors were described and classified according to recurring grammatical patterns rather than predetermined taxonomic categories. The classification process revealed several major patterns, including tense inconsistency, inappropriate verb-form selection, incorrect question formation, sentence structure

problems, and minor mechanical or stylistic errors. Particular attention was given to errors involving shifts between present and past forms, misuse of auxiliary verbs, incorrect tense selection, and difficulties in maintaining a consistent temporal framework throughout the dialogue.

The classification of errors was intended to provide a clearer understanding of how learners used grammatical resources to construct meaning within a contextualized writing task. Each identified error was recorded, categorized, and interpreted in relation to learners' developing grammatical competence and their understanding of tense and aspect distinctions.

Data Analysis Techniques

Initially, all students' written dialogues were examined carefully to identify grammatical errors related to the use of Simple Past and Past Continuous tenses. Each error was recorded and classified according to the predefined categories based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy.

Results

Data taken from a total population sampling technique were analyzed and the error usage of Simple Past and Past Continuous was corrected as it can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Error Analysis of Simple Past and Past Continuous

No	Original Sentence	Error Description	Corrected Version
1	Oh no, look at Pluto. He was lying down and he looks so weak.	Mixed tense use: was lying (past continuous) with looks (simple present). Verb tense should be consistent.	He was lying down and he looked so weak.
2	The dog was moving so slowly this morning. He hasn't touched his food.	Mixed time reference: this morning (past context) with hasn't touched (present perfect). Should use past tense.	The dog was moving so slowly this morning. He didn't touch his food.
3	I checked his gums and they look pale. He was shaking a lot earlier.	Mixed tense: checked (past) with look (present). Should use past tense.	I checked his gums and they looked pale.

4	We brought him to the vet last week, but he seems worse today.	Verb tense mostly acceptable, but infinitive structure lacks parallel clarity after conjunction but.	We brought him to the vet last week, but he seemed worse today.
5	The dog took the medicine and was feeling better.	Grammatically possible, but less consistent aspect use. Better to use simple past if finished event.	The dog took the medicine and felt better.
6	I gave the dog medicine so he would get well soon.	Grammatically acceptable. No major tense error. If intended simple past only, modal construction may be unnecessary.	I gave the dog medicine so he got well soon.
7	What did do next?	Missing subject after auxiliary did . Incorrect question structure.	What did you do next?
8	The dog doesn't look well yesterday	Present tense doesn't look used with past time marker yesterday . Should use past tense.	The dog didn't look well yesterday.

The grammatical errors found in the students' comic strip writing can be generalized into several recurring patterns. The most dominant error involves **tense inconsistency**, particularly the mixing of present tense forms with past tense narration (data 1, data 2, and data 3). Since the comic strips describe completed events, students were expected to use simple past and past continuous consistently. However, some students shifted to present forms such as *looks*, *look*, and *doesn't look* while describing past situations. This indicates that students still experience difficulty maintaining tense agreement throughout a narrative text.

Another common pattern is the **incorrect selection of verb forms**, especially the use of present perfect instead of simple past (data 2). For example, one student wrote *He hasn't touched his food* while referring to an event that happened earlier that morning. Because the action occurred at a definite past time, the sentence should use simple past rather than present perfect. This suggests that students may not yet fully understand the distinction between past actions with clear time markers and actions connected to the present.

The data also reveal **errors in sentence structure**, particularly in forming interrogative sentences and parallel constructions. In the sentence *What did do next?* (data 7), the subject was omitted after the auxiliary verb *did*, resulting in an incomplete question structure. Similarly, some students produced less balanced coordinated

structures, such as combining verbs without clear parallel form. These mistakes show that students still need support in mastering basic English sentence patterns.

In addition, several sentences contain **mechanical and stylistic errors**, including awkward aspect choices. Other sentences used past continuous forms where simple past would sound more natural, such as *was feeling better* instead of *felt better* (data 5). Although these errors are less serious than tense mistakes, they still affect the clarity and quality of students' written production.

Overall, the findings suggest that students' main difficulties lie in controlling tense consistency, choosing appropriate verb forms, and constructing grammatically accurate sentences. These patterns indicate that further instruction should focus on the use of simple past and past continuous in narrative contexts, sentence formation practice, and guided editing activities.

Discussion

The Scaffolding Effect of Multimodality and Low Error Frequency

Contrary to expectations that vocational students would encounter considerable difficulty using past tenses, the findings revealed a relatively high level of grammatical accuracy. One plausible explanation is the scaffolding provided by the multimodal nature of comic strips. Unlike conventional recount writing or isolated grammar exercises, comic strips offer sequential visual cues that serve as contextual support, reducing the cognitive demands of second-language writing (Chirkova et al., 2021).

In the present study, these visual cues enabled students to maintain a coherent narrative sequence while describing veterinary procedures. The step-by-step illustrations likely reduced the mental effort required to organize events and apply appropriate tense forms, allowing learners to allocate more cognitive resources to language production (Thomas et al., 2026). This finding suggests that the multimodal design of comic strips can facilitate grammatical performance by bridging visual and linguistic processing. As a result, syntactic errors, such as the incorrect question formation in **Data 7** ("What did do next?"), occurred only occasionally and were more likely to emerge when the linguistic complexity of the dialogue exceeded students' immediate processing capacity.

Tense Inconsistency and L1 Interference

This study assumed that veterinary vocational students would experience grammatical difficulties when using the Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense in a comic strip writing task. The findings support this assumption. Across the collected data, students showed recurring problems in tense consistency, verb selection, sentence structure, and grammatical accuracy. These results are consistent with previous studies which reported that past tense remains one of the most problematic grammatical areas for EFL learners (Fanny et al., 2022; Nahak et al., 2024; Seruni, 2023).

The results also support Corder's (1967, 1975) theory that learner errors are systematic evidence of developing interlanguage rather than random mistakes. The students in this study appeared to possess partial knowledge of past tense rules, yet they were unable to apply them consistently in contextualized written production. This reflects McMahon's (2021) argument that learner errors reveal the current state of learners' internal language systems.

The most frequent error pattern in this study was tense inconsistency, especially shifts from past tense narration to present tense forms. In **Data 1**, the learner wrote *He was lying down... and he looks so weak*. In **Data 3**, the student wrote *I checked his gums and they look pale*. In **Data 8**, the sentence *The dog doesn't look well yesterday* combines present tense with a clear past time marker.

A plausible explanation for this pattern is L1 interference combined with cognitive demands during writing. Indonesian language does not express past time through verb inflection, allowing learners to rely on the same verb form regardless of temporal reference. Consequently, students may unconsciously transfer this linguistic feature into English, especially when cognitive resources are divided between generating ideas, constructing dialogue, organizing visual sequences, and monitoring grammatical accuracy (Marita, 2021). Recent studies also argue that the absence of a tense-aspect system in learners' first language frequently results in tense shifting, particularly during cognitively demanding narrative tasks (Liu, 2022). As noted by Sari et al. (2023), learners often experience difficulty mastering English tense-aspect distinctions because equivalent grammatical constructions are absent from their native language. In the present study, students appeared to prioritize communicating the clinical condition of the animal—for example, describing that *the dog looks pale*—over maintaining the grammatical consistency required by a past-tense narrative.

These findings partially align with previous research identifying misinformation as the dominant error category in past-tense writing (Fanny et al., 2022; Setyaningrum, 2018). However, the present study extends earlier work by demonstrating that, in comic strip writing, the primary challenge is not merely producing incorrect verb forms but sustaining tense consistency across connected clauses and sentences. This distinction may stem from the unique characteristics of comic strip composition. Unlike controlled grammar exercises or traditional recount paragraphs, comic strips require learners to integrate language production with visual storytelling, dialogue construction, and sequential event organization. As a result, learners' attention is often directed toward meaning-making and narrative coherence, leaving fewer cognitive resources available for continuous monitoring of tense agreement. This explains why students who generally demonstrated accurate grammatical knowledge still produced occasional shifts between past and present tense during extended narratives.

Confusion in Verb Form Selection

Another major finding concerns inappropriate verb form selection. In **Data 2**, the student wrote *He hasn't touched his food* after mentioning *this morning*. Since the event occurred at a definite past time, the more appropriate form would be *didn't touch*.

This finding is consistent with Fitria (2020), who reported that verb-related grammar errors were highly frequent in student writing, particularly when learners had to choose among different tense systems. It also supports Handayani (2019), who found that verb tense misuse was one of the dominant grammatical problems among Indonesian EFL learners. The error suggests that students may recognize the meaning of completed action but still confuse the grammatical distinction between present perfect and simple past. This demonstrates that tense learning is not limited to memorizing verb changes, but also requires understanding semantic concepts such as completedness, relevance, and time reference.

Difficulty in Using Past Continuous Meaningfully

Although the study examined both Simple Past and Past Continuous, the Past Continuous forms were less frequent and appeared mostly in memorized structural patterns. In **Data 1**, the learner correctly used *was lying down*. In **Data 2**, the phrase *was moving so slowly* was acceptable, and in **Data 3**, *was shaking a lot earlier* was also structurally accurate. However, these forms were often surrounded by tense inconsistency elsewhere in the sentence.

This supports previous findings that learners often find Past Continuous more difficult than Simple Past because it requires both tense marking and aspectual understanding. Mergani and Aidaroos (2015) found that students performed better in Simple Past than in Past Continuous tests, while Samad (2022) reported high error percentages in past progressive forms.

The current study confirms these findings in a writing context. Students seemed able to recall the pattern *was/were + verb-ing*, but they did not always understand how to combine it functionally with Simple Past in narrative discourse. This indicates that learners may master grammatical formulas before mastering their communicative use.

Sentence Structure and Question Formation Errors

The results also revealed structural problems in interrogative sentences. In **Data 7**, the learner wrote *What did do next?* which omits the subject after the auxiliary *did*. The correct form would be *What did you do next?* This type of error can be categorized under omission according to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy, as discussed by Cheng (2015). The omission of the subject suggests that students know the need for auxiliary *did* in past questions but have not fully mastered complete sentence formation. This finding demonstrates that tense learning is closely connected with syntax. Even if learners know past tense markers, they may still struggle when those markers must be integrated into more complex structures such as WH-questions.

Mechanical and Stylistic Errors

In **Data 5**, *was feeling better* is grammatically possible, but *felt better* may be more natural in a completed narrative sequence. In **Data 6**, the sentence *I gave the dog medicine so he would get well soon* is understandable, although stylistically more complex than necessary. Such findings correspond with Corder's distinction between systematic errors and performance mistake. Furthermore, these findings are consistent with the distinction between systematic errors (competence) and performance mistakes or slips during language production (Mhamedi & Ibrir, 2025). Recent studies suggest that such deviations are not necessarily caused by insufficient grammatical knowledge but are often associated with the cognitive demands placed on learners during writing tasks (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2023). Because writing requires simultaneous planning, language formulation, and self-monitoring, learners may experience attentional lapses or working memory overload, particularly when integrating technical ESP vocabulary into a coherent narrative (Vasylets et al., 2022). Moreover, second-language development involves not only producing grammatically correct sentences but also developing stylistically appropriate language use. As noted by Dobrić (2023) and Sigott (2023), learners frequently generate grammatically acceptable yet less natural expressions because they have not fully acquired the discourse conventions and register of their target domain. Therefore, the language choices observed in this study likely reflect the learners' current stage of interlanguage development, where successful communication is prioritized than native-like linguistic sophistication.

Comic Strip Writing as a Scaffolding

An important contribution of this study is the use of comic strip writing as a source of grammatical data. Previous literature has emphasized the motivational and pedagogical value of comic strips. Drolet (2010) argued that comics can support grammar, vocabulary, and analytical skills, while Kicikaya and Krajka (2012) found promising results in grammar and sentence writing through web-based comic creation. Megawati and Anugerahwati (2012) also reported that comic strips improved narrative writing performance in Indonesian classrooms.

Contrary to the assumption that veterinary vocational students would struggle significantly, the findings reveal a high degree of grammatical accuracy across the 60 comic strips. This success can be explained by the scaffolding effect of multimodality. Unlike traditional controlled grammar exercises, comic strips provide visual sequences that act as "contextual anchors," reducing the cognitive load (Chirkova et al., 2021). By visualizing the veterinary procedure, the mental effort required to monitor tenses is supported by the narrative flow (Fanny et al., 2023). This explains why errors in Sentence Structure and Question Formation (e.g., **Data 7**: *"What did do next?"*) were relatively rare; the visual context helped students maintain the communicative thread even when minor syntactic omissions occurred.

Implications for ESP and Vocational Contexts and Limitation of the Study

This study also responds to the gap identified in the literature concerning ESP and vocational learners. Farid et al. (2025) emphasized that vocational students need contextually relevant materials, and ESP-oriented comic content can be highly engaging. Similarly, the current study demonstrates that veterinary-themed comic strips can generate meaningful language output while exposing learners' grammatical needs.

For students in veterinary or health-related programs, accurate tense use is important because they may need to describe symptoms, treatments, procedures, and patient histories. Therefore, grammar instruction should integrate professional scenarios rather than isolated textbook examples. Activities such as veterinary case comics, treatment narratives, and symptom-report dialogues may help students apply grammar more meaningfully.

While this study does not claim comic strips are a formal diagnostic tool, it demonstrates their value as a medium for revealing authentic grammatical needs. For veterinary ESP programs, the findings suggest that instruction should prioritize contextualized multimodal tasks over isolated rule memorization. For example, **Data 1, Data 2, and Data 3** required students to describe animal conditions, and their errors emerged naturally in meaningful communication rather than artificial drills.

Conclusions

Overall, this study confirms previous research that past tense remains problematic for EFL learners, but it also adds new insight by showing how these problems emerge in comic strip writing and ESP veterinary contexts. The repeated shifts between present and past forms suggest that learners may know grammar rules in isolation but still struggle to apply them consistently during authentic communication. This finding is theoretically important because it supports interlanguage theory, where learner language develops gradually through unstable transitional systems. Practically, it suggests that grammar teaching should move beyond rule memorization toward contextualized production tasks. If future studies with larger samples confirm these patterns, comic strip writing may become a valuable method for both teaching and diagnosing grammatical development in vocational EFL classrooms.

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