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## Pre-service Teachers' Views on Using English Comics to Improve Pupils' English Language Skills

Najihah Pazaer  
Aladdin Assaiqeli\*

Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, 35900 Tanjong Malim, MALAYSIA

### Abstract

*This paper highlights the ESL pre-service elementary school teachers' views on using English comics in the classroom and using English comics to assist elementary school pupils in improving their English language skills. A descriptive survey research design was used, and a quantitative method study was done among 64 pre-service teachers utilising an internet questionnaire as an instrument aimed to answer questions concerning their views towards the use of English comics as a medium for teaching and learning English and the effectiveness in improving pupils' English language abilities. The results from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively, and the findings were summarised using descriptive statistics and frequency count to characterise the properties of the large group of samples. From the survey, it was found that most pre-service teachers have positive perceptions of using comic books as teaching and learning tools in class. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the pre-service teachers believe it is advantageous to improving students' English language abilities. The study offers other recommendations for future research and implications that might help ESL instructors and young students enhance their students' English language proficiency.*

**Keywords:** English comics, English language, multimodal, pre-service elementary school teachers.

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\* Corresponding author, email: [assaiqeli@fbk.upsi.edu.my](mailto:assaiqeli@fbk.upsi.edu.my)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

New perspectives on education emerge due to fast technological breakthroughs in this globalised 21st century of teaching and learning. Nowadays, the resources utilised during teaching and learning English are diverse, in which learners are expected to participate in an interactive educational environment using various tools. In order to promote students' participation, teachers must expose students to a range of materials. The value of presenting a range of educational resources to learners cannot be underestimated; it is regarded as a vital process in engaging the students' attention, encouraging second language (L2) learners to embrace the language, and ensuring that they are not intimidated by it. This corresponds with [Assaiqeli et al. \(2021\)](#), who emphasised that language teachers need to shift their views in looking at language as an object and start emphasising the 'human factor' instead when teaching the language, where the primary objective is for students to utilise the language. In this method, the students can engage in meaningful interactions with engaging content while learning and mastering the language.

As a result, in the effort to create an innovative educational environment, several learning modalities or composite texts, such as English comics, can be among the best tools that teachers and pre-service teachers may use as effective teaching materials when teaching and learning English in the classroom. Adopting English comics not only provides a different variety of printed multimodality but also inspires students to read, boosts students' awareness of language usage, and assists students in improving their English proficiency level ([Ahmadi et al., 2017](#); [Sarada, 2016](#)). According to [Krashen \(2004\)](#), every language learner can benefit from reading comics as it is the most direct approach to acquiring a second language, especially English language learners (ELLs) with poor English competence who require time and assistance in order to be fluent in English in both academic and social aspect. According to [Baker \(2011\)](#), the number of ELLs with poor English competence has increased dramatically over the last 20 years, and these ELLs need to catch up to their native-speaker classmates. Nevertheless, English caricatures in comics are among the strongest literary instruments that assist these students in bridging the void and operate as an aiding tool that ESL teachers can use in teaching English. In a study by [Liu \(2004\)](#), visual representations of language in textbooks for ESL and EFL students, such as images, caricatures, and comic strips, assist readers in assimilating information and recalling the relevant input despite the text's linguistic complexity.

Realising the diversity of different learning capabilities of students, i.e. some students seem to be more advanced than others, has led to a study of the various aspects of language learning and teaching strategies, [Manno \(2014, as cited in Sarada, 2016\)](#) revealed that comics, as a visual component in a multimodal text, can help and inspire struggling learners to spark their interest and curiosity while integrating English in the lesson. This improves their English language abilities and makes the teaching and learning sessions more effective. The purpose of visual representation or multimodal pedagogy offered by comics goes beyond just pleasantly learning a language. It can also teach students the importance of deciphering the messages behind an image that may encapsulate and signify a culture depending on the material used. [Assaiqeli \(2021\)](#) demonstrated how Palestinian visual language, for example, works to record and express significant Palestinian national themes, thereby contributing to the preservation of Palestinian national identity and the revival of Palestinian nationalism

and national consciousness. This study established that people could transmit sentiments and invoke memory despite historical oblivion just through visual language.

Given that studies on teachers' attitudes toward using English comics in English language classes have been conducted by many researchers, pre-service elementary school teachers' views of using this learning material as a tool in language classrooms remain poorly researched and under-theorised. Limited information was known regarding pre-service teachers' attitudes toward using English comics in the classroom, particularly to help learners improve their English language abilities. Due to their lack of experience, pre-service teachers are increasingly concerned about their inefficiency in applying theory to practices and, eventually, to the real world (Bolton-Gary, 2012). This is consistent with Yoon (2012), who stated that the lack of professional classroom teaching experience contributes to the incapacity to employ composite or multimodal texts in class, including using English comics in formal classrooms. Teachers are seen as an essential key feature in the classroom, and these ESL teachers must endure substantially more anxiety than experienced ESL teachers. Furthermore, there are conflicting attitudes in language learning and prejudices against multimodality, such as comics being utilised in educational settings and as part of English language instruction because they are not regarded actual books (Callahan, 2009 as cited in Goh, 2017).

The primary research objective of this study was to analyse ESL pre-service elementary school teachers' views towards the use of English comics in the teaching and learning process as well as to identify the ESL pre-service teacher's views on the efficiency of English comic books in helping elementary school students in developing their English language skills.

To meet the objectives of this research, the following research problems are formulated:

1. What are the perceptions of pre-service elementary school teachers related to the usage of English comics in the classroom?
2. What are pre-service elementary school teachers' views on the effectiveness of English comics in helping students improve their English language skills?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The current education community has shifted their focus from teaching basic skills to higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), where students need to learn, think creatively, come up with reasons and decisions, and have skills to solve problems. This reinforcement may be provided to ELLs through reading materials containing visuals and texts. English comics can help enhance L2 learners' English proficiency level in terms of four main skills: (1) reading skills, (2) writing skills, (3) listening skills and (4) speaking skills.

### **2.1 Comics in Enhancing Reading Skills**

Before proceeding to more complex readings, many students start with comics since they require time and guidance to become proficient in formal educational and social language. Merç (2013) suggested comics be used in class, especially to

encourage and increase learners' interest in reading and pointed out in the recent literature that visual aids in reading comprehension can be a great teaching aid. Comics offer endless advantages, where not only can they elicit information and assist in language production, but they can also act as one of the methods to assist slow readers (Baker, 2011). Apart from that, comic text activities can also expose teachers to new instructional methods and tactics, as well as ways to improve their own pedagogies (Marlatt & Dallacqua, 2013). This is not unexpected as Ulu et al. (2017) also stated that students' critical reading abilities would increase as they assess and relate the meanings represented by diverse teaching aid; therefore, teachers should find ways to incorporate multimodal literacy into the teaching and learning process, particularly to enhance the students' critical reading capabilities.

Initially, the pre-service teachers were sceptical about utilising imagery to enhance their material and act as a motivator for reading and writing. However, based on their written observations, sentiments shifted substantially following their application of the tools in class (Barry, 2012). The pattern of the results is congruent with Dual Coding Theory (DCT), as noted by the researcher, who stated that students who utilised comic strips had a solid beneficial impact and were able to retain the text with the assistance of a comic strip, while learners who did not have access to comic strips struggled to understand textbooks. This is in line with the results of Abdullah and Yunus (2019), who discovered that most students considered that English comics provided numerous benefits in enhancing their reading abilities. Thus, it has been proven that comic strips could help enhance low-level and high-level learners' reading comprehension.

## **2.2 Comics in Enhancing Writing Skills**

On the other hand, writing involves the process of encoding, which may be one of the most challenging skills to be taught, even for adults. While some learners are always eager to try writing in English, others may be hesitant, which may stem from concerns about their spelling or ability to build phrases and paragraphs. If these concerns are reinforced due to their inability to accomplish writing duties satisfactorily, the learners' attitude toward writing is likely to worsen (Rani, 2016). As more people realise the importance of communicating effectively in English, advanced writing skills are becoming increasingly respected. Learners need much practice and long-lasting effort to enhance their writing skills. This is as quoted by Bowkett (2011, as cited in Ahmadi et al., 2017), who stated that using comics, pictures, and graphic novels could assist learners in generating, organising, and refining their ideas when writing; this further develops their creative writing abilities. In addition, elementary school students are more inclined to engage in highly structured narrative forms. This situation unintentionally promotes broader meta-cognitive abilities that develop their thinking skills in writing.

Gorjian and Branch (2016) claimed that through comics, learners could practice writing reported speech and practice writing stories in sequential order. In addition, comics could also assist learners with the use of time-sequence transition words in order to maintain the flow of a story or a paragraph. Therefore, English comics can help learners to improve their writing skills. According to Baker (2011), combining text and visuals will cause learners to study the relationship between the two and promotes their critical thinking, thus enabling them to enhance their writing skills.

English comics could serve as a medium for transmitting the content, organisation, and grammatical components of narrative texts to the learners. Hence, English comics can be considered in teaching writing skills in addition to their appealing forms (Megawati, 2012). Comic books combine text and visuals in a way that can effectively communicate ideas and encourage students' engagement, making comics an appealing substitute for teachers who wish to help pupils with their English. The aforementioned research was carried out by Baker (2011), Megawati (2012), and Gorjian and Branch (2016), and the results show that English comics play a significant role in promoting a diverse classroom environment and, at the same time, enhancing students' writing skills.

### 2.3 Comics in Enhancing Listening Skills

Teaching and learning listening skills by using comics are still underexplored, and there are a minimal number of studies that focus on this area. This is probably because it may be hard for teachers to use textual teaching tools to teach listening, in which they usually would use audio aid instead. However, based on the findings of a study conducted by Arast and Gorjian (2016), reading comic strip stories along with comic illustrations had a more significant influence on the growth in vocabulary knowledge than just listening to the stories alone. It has been found that reading comic strip stories aloud can influence accidental vocabulary development. The use of English comics allows for various listening activities where these pre-service teachers can read aloud from stories and use props or artwork in a classroom setting.

According to Ahmad (2011), learning new vocabulary is crucial for ESL students who want to become proficient and competent in their target language, making it easier to talk and write clearly. It is believed that texts in comic strips are excellent instruments for acquiring vocabulary and enhancing the learners' listening abilities (Arast & Gorjian, 2016). The results of their study revealed high variations in the average post-test scores after the treatment, which utilise comic strip stories. The study also showed that hearing funny stories could also positively impact vocabulary acquisition. Tovar (2017) explained that using comic strips is vital in cooperative learning sessions since it is an excellent technique to make pupils work together and become engaged in education. The classroom activities of asking pupils to repeat the words in the comics help to enhance pupils' listening and speaking skills. Thus, it needs serious efforts from the teacher to assist pupils in using this tool to learn the language. However, teachers should not be afraid of losing control of the classroom and ignore the potential of using comics during English teaching and learning process (Fasae & Akinwamide, 2018).

### 2.4 Comics in Enhancing Speaking Skills

A comic strip story is a piece of media with comedic elements that helps to calm the learning environment and is well-known to pupils. Since comics are entertaining yet require interpretation, reading them has several educational advantages. Cartoons are humorous and open-ended, which enables the reader to pause and think. Pupils were not afraid to present a "wrong" answer because all they had to do was to show reasons for why their opinion was reasonable rather than "correct" (Wylie & Neely, 2016). It indicates that teaching speaking through comic strips is a valuable method to



develop students' speaking skills by providing basic examples of comic strip stories that are easy to grasp since they are relevant to students' daily lives (Nuarita, 2015). However, most L2 learners now need help in speaking English, and the topic of Malaysian students' English proficiency has been addressed and debated extensively. One of the linguistic abilities they lack is speaking ability. They may have passed the English language section of the final test. However, many people do not fare well in English-language interviews (Mohtar et al., 2015). This is most likely because the language has developed into a fear-inducing factor that prevents pupils from speaking the language. Nevertheless, utilising English comics as a teaching medium can be appealing and exciting when teaching English speaking abilities to young pupils. According to Anggriani (2013), students who use English comics to supplement their studies show more significant interest in the material and greater levels of engagement. Students at a young age frequently prefer to read comic books for fun and educational pleasure, and these young learners may be unaware that they are enhancing their English language skills while having fun with their activities. Klau (2015) claimed that the improvement in the speaking skill likely occurred since pupils found it less daunting to speak while holding comic strips instead of textbooks.

Comics can help students improve their speaking skills since the text in the comics is easier for them to understand and is not just material that focuses on texts and visuals. It employs readers with cultural and linguistic integration and helps learners enhance their speaking skills (Clydesdale, 2007). In addition, the pictures in comic strips will eventually facilitate learners to memorise and recall words a lot easier and thus increase engagement in conversation. In addition, Gavigan and Tomasevich (2011) stated that comics make texts less threatening and create a less intimidating atmosphere in class, thus helping to increase learners' motivation as they usually do not realise that they are learning English. Csabay (2006) also mentioned that comic strips could help learners make a conversation in both formal and informal language. Using comics as a teaching and learning tool can also help learners not sound too 'textbook' or bookish due to the excessive exposure of written and formal language.

## **2.5 The Conceptual Framework of the Study**

English teachers should employ engaging, enjoyable, and suitable media in the teaching and learning process in the classroom to increase the students' interest and motivation in learning English. Csabay (2006) mentioned that comic book is one of the media that may assist students in dealing with both written and spoken language. Students are inspired to interpret their thoughts based on the facial expressions of comic characters. Moreover, the plot in the comics gives the student information to narrate or explain. In an English language lesson, a comic is one medium that might help students become more engaged. The mental model theory proposed by Marcus et al. (1996) provides a solid justification. These researchers contend that since pictures and images may convey crucial information more succinctly than similar written assertions, they help lessen the cognitive burden associated with complicated reasoning tasks. This benefit is also strengthened by the fact that illustrations are easier to understand than text because they eliminate the need for the reader to create a mental model of the relationships. Figures illustrated in a comic book can assist students in dealing with spoken and even casual language.

Furthermore, a comic book has a plethora of visual signals that can engage students and make the material provided in comics stay in the students' mind for a more extended period. By considering those theories, it is expected that a set of comic books can be used to enhance students' language skills. Comics can also help students become more motivated to study English in fun and engaging ways. Therefore, the results of the present research result are expected to identify the actual scenario of to what extent the pre-service teachers are willing to conduct lessons to elementary school pupils by utilising English comics and to find out their views on the effectiveness of English comic books as a tool in improving elementary school pupils' English language abilities.

### **3. METHODS**

This study employed a quantitative method in collecting, analysing, and interpreting data (Creswell, 2009). The descriptive survey research design has been chosen as the research method for the researchers to build a collection of predetermined questions to characterise the properties of the sample. Questions pertinent to the study's topic are included in descriptive survey designs. To get honest responses from teachers, an online survey was used to examine pre-service teachers' views on the use of English comics in order to enhance elementary school students' English language proficiency. In essence, descriptive research involves outlining the actions of those whom the researcher has chosen to participate in the study process to thoroughly grasp the topic and aid in defining the characteristics of the population.

#### **3.1 Participant Characteristics**

The population for this study was the pre-service teachers enrolling at Diploma in TESL in one of the college universities located in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. The data and information in this study were primary data, where a non-probability sampling technique was employed, and a controlled quota sampling technique was chosen to accomplish this research's purposes.

Certain constraints were put in place to limit the choice of participants to collect representative data. Only pre-service teachers who had completed or were presently completing their teaching practice as English teachers in elementary schools as part of the completion requirement in the Diploma of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) were selected as respondents. There were 64 pre-service teachers, including 12 male teachers and 52 female teachers ranging from 20 to 26 years old. Achieving an equal number of female and male responders was unattainable due to a lower proportion of male pre-service teachers enrolled throughout the intake. Additionally, most survey participants were Malay, with just one Iban participant. These pre-service teachers taught elementary school English to students in grades 1 through 6 at the time of data collection or had done so in the past internship.

#### **3.2 Research Instruments**

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19 resulting in the implementation of the lockdowns, an online close-ended questionnaire was used as the research instrument

in this study. It consisted of a series of questions (items) designed to elicit responses from the pre-service elementary school teachers, and this online questionnaire was distributed by the course coordinator using Google Forms.

The questionnaire consisted of 42 main items divided into some sections. The first section of this questionnaire sought general information on potential variables that impact pre-service English teachers' attitudes toward using comics in the classroom, i.e. gender, age, race, and grade level. The second section comprised elements to record pre-service teachers' perspectives and attitudes on using English comics in English classes to teach reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. The final section dealt with pre-service elementary school teachers' opinions on the effectiveness of English comics in developing young learners' competency in the English language.

The questionnaire has various question types, such as a dichotomous scale in the demographic background section on the respondents' gender, race, and grade level. The five-point Likert scale questions ranging from '1=Strongly Disagree', '2=Disagree', '3=not sure', '4=Agree' and '5=Strongly Agree' and '1=not effective', '2=somehow effective', '3=not sure', '4=effective' and '5=very effective' were also employed in the instrument. Respondents may quickly respond to inquiries and indicate their degree of agreement in five points using this psychometric response approach. This scale was included in the questionnaire to enable respondents to acknowledge their degree of agreement or disagreement to various claims about attitude, object, person, or event (Taherdoost, 2019). Before the questionnaire was administered to the target participants, a pilot study had been conducted to determine the internal reliability of all items in the questionnaire, and Cronbach alpha reliability index was calculated. The alpha coefficient for the 42 items is  $\alpha=.906$ , suggesting that the items had relatively high internal consistency.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively. Descriptive analysis was then utilised to discover the answer to the questions of ESL pre-service teachers' perception towards the use of English comics in classrooms and their views regarding the use of English comic books as a tool in improving elementary school pupils' English language skills. This research focuses on the four primary language skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Pre-service Teachers' Perception of the Use of English Comics in Classroom**

The first research question addresses the perception of pre-service elementary school teachers on the use of English comic books in the teaching and learning process. According to the findings, most of the respondents, despite different age or gender, viewed English comic books favourably. Table 1 displays the pre-service teachers' views of English comics.



**Table 1.** Pre-service teachers' perception regarding English comics.

Item	Category	Percentage
Read English comics as a child	Yes	90.6%
	No	9.4%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Introduced to English comics during teacher education prior to teaching	Yes	68.8%
	No	31.3%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
If yes, to what extent?	Selected 'No' to previous items	31.3%
	Very briefly	7.8%
	Briefly	37.5%
	Often	20.3%
	Very often	3.1%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Frequency of using graphic novels/English comics with pupils	Never	29.7%
	Once per month	12.5%
	Once per week	43.8%
	3 times per week	12.5%
	Everyday	1.6%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
General feelings about using graphic novels/English comics in classrooms	Will never use	1.6%
	Might use	21.9%
	Use in some situations	67.2%
	Use them whenever possible	9.4%

According to Ulu et al. (2017), it is essential that pre-service elementary school teachers develop self-efficacy in multimodal literacy and critical reading during their undergraduate studies. It is vital that these ESL in-training elementary school teachers be well-informed and trained about this alternative teaching component, particularly since it will have a significant impact on their students' language learning acquisition. Based on the data collected, 31.3% claimed that they were never introduced to English comics as teaching and learning tools during teacher education prior to teaching, and 68.8% claimed that they had been exposed to the teaching tools. Nevertheless, despite the exposure, only a small proportion of respondents – 20.3% and 3.1%, respectively, said it was frequently and very frequently discussed, whereas 37.5% and 7.8%, respectively – said the topic was just briefly covered during their diploma education. This indicates that these pre-service elementary school teachers still lacked sufficient expertise in employing multimodal elements, which led to a lack of confidence in conveying knowledge to their students using the stated sources.

Many new teachers are concerned about literacy instruction during their internship programmes (Barry, 2012), which is consistent with the current research findings. The pre-service teachers surveyed indicated that they never utilise English comics as teaching and learning tools (29.7%), and this is probably due to a lack of instruction and exposure. However, positive general feelings about using graphic novels/English comics in the classroom can be seen in the data, with 21.9%, 67.2%, and 9.4%, respectively, mentioning that they might use comics, use them in some situations, and use them whenever possible if they learned more about them during their diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language. This is consistent with Clark (2013, as cited in Marlatt & Dallacqua, 2019), who believed that the hesitancy of pre-service teachers to employ comic books as a teaching aid might stem from a lack of knowledge and fear that administrators, other teachers, parents, and even their students would perceive their class as too easy because of the use of comic books. Moreover,

they were also worried that they would not be able to meet content standards appropriately.

Nonetheless, despite the assertion, most respondents claimed that they had used English comics with elementary school students during their teaching practice sessions on a monthly to daily basis. There was 43.8% (n=28) of the respondents who said that they read comics once a week; while 12.5% (n=8) of them said that they read them three times a week and once a month; and only 1.6% of the respondents said that they read comics daily. Based on the data collected, it can be seen that these pre-service teachers do have an interest in teaching tools that assist them in directing the students' attention to classroom lessons. It is understandable why these aspiring pre-service elementary school teachers have begun to rely on them and use them throughout the teaching and learning process, particularly among elementary school students as English comics provide various vocabulary, appealing colours, intriguing visual art, and page layout (Wylie & Neeley, 2016).

Table 2 presents the pre-service teachers' perception of using English comics in teaching English skills.

**Table 2.** Pre-service teachers' perception of using English comics in teaching English skills.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree %
Reading	0.0%	1.6%	10.9%	50.0%	37.5%
Speaking	0.0%	6.3%	25.0%	45.3%	23.4%
Writing	0.0%	3.1%	34.4%	40.6%	21.9%
Listening	1.6%	15.6	34.4%	29.7%	18.8%

Most respondents agreed that they would utilise English comics to teach all four main English skills based on the order; reading, speaking, writing, and listening. This is consistent with Liu (2004), who stated numerous rationale on why educators should employ visual art in reading: (1) representation, in which repeating text material from visual elements of the comics will aid students' comprehension; (2) organisation of illustrations will improve the comprehensibility of the text; (3) function of transformation will be used to capture vital information in graphics into a distinctive form; and finally (4) caricatures and images will improve students' motivation in acquiring linguistic skills. According to Baker (2011), due to the reinforcement of visual elements, English comics may be highly motivational for learners and are much simpler to comprehend. This may explain why most respondents agree on utilising English comics in teaching.

#### **4.2 Elementary School Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of English Comics to Enhance Students' English Language Skills**

The second research question was about ESL pre-service elementary school teachers' views of the effectiveness of English comic books in enhancing the language skills of elementary school students. Based on the total mean score of all four English skills, reading skill had the highest mean with an average of 4.28 (SD=0.54), followed by speaking skill of 4.21 (SD=0.57), listening skill of 4.16 (SD=0.59) and writing skill with an average of 4.03 (SD=0.60).

The responses from the pre-service elementary school teachers involved in this study and the descriptive analysis for the mean scores to the second research question were sorted from ‘most effective’ to ‘not at all effective’, and the total mean score was organised from the highest to the lowest. The results are as follows:

#### 4.2.1 Reading skills

Table 3 presents the pre-service teachers’ perception of using English comics to increase elementary school students’ reading skills.

**Table 3.** Perception towards the usage of English comics to increase reading skills.

Item		Percentage %				
		Not effective at all	Less effective	Not Sure	Effective	Very Effective
R7	Encourage pupils to actively engage in reading activities.	0%	0%	7.8%	35.9%	56.3%
R4	Improve pupils’ vocabulary and spelling.	0%	1.6%	12.5%	35.9%	50.0%
R2	Support pupils’ understanding of what they have read.	0%	0%	10.9%	46.9%	42.4%
R3	Assist pupils in drawing inferences based on what they have read.	0%	0%	18.8%	37.5%	43.8%
R5	Boost pupils’ L2 reading rate.	0%	3.1%	9.4%	46.9%	40.6%
R6	Enhance pupils’ L2 reading attitudes.	0%	1.6%	17.2%	40.6%	40.6%
R1	Aid pupils in identifying the key points of the reading materials.	0%	3.1%	15.6%	50%	31.3%

Based on data from the questionnaire, reading skills were the most positively perceived language skill that may be enhanced by utilising English comics. The questionnaire statement ‘motivate pupils to participate actively in reading activities’ received the most significant proportion of effective and very effective responses for the attribution of reading skill, while the item ‘assist pupils in identifying the main ideas of what they have read’ received the lowest. The respondents stated that employing English comics may be particularly effective in motivating students to participate in L2 reading activities and in improving students’ attitudes toward L2 reading.

Furthermore, the surveyed pre-service teachers felt that using English comics may assist pupils in improving their vocabulary. According to [Gorjian and Branch \(2016\)](#), studying comic books while learning English allows students to practise various verb tenses, synonyms, antonyms, character descriptions using adjectives, and vocabulary growth. Additionally, the pre-service teachers were also found to have good impressions on the effectiveness of English comics in enhancing students’ understanding, encouraging students to draw inferences, and recognising the major concepts of the materials that they have read. This further led to an increase in L2

reading speed. Indeed, such intersemiotic complementarity, as indicated by Assaiqeli (2021), would have a collocational relationship between the visual and verbal elements of the text that reinforced the message communicated — intersemiotically (verbal-visual intersemiosis).

#### 4.2.2 Speaking skills

Table 4 presents the pre-service teachers' perception towards using English comics to increase elementary school pupils' speaking skills.

**Table 4.** Perception towards the usage of English comics to increase speaking skills.

Item		Percentage %				
		Not effective at all	Less effective	Not Sure	Effective	Very Effective
S1	Encourage pupils to communicate in simple phrases.	0%	0%	7.8%	50.0%	42.2%
S3	Help pupils overcome timidity in English-language conversations.	0%	0%	14.1%	43.8%	42.2%
S2	Help pupils to feel relaxed to speak English in class.	0%	0%	14.1%	42.2%	43.8%
S7	Motivate pupils to participate actively in speaking assessment.	0%	1.6%	12.5%	43.8%	42.2%
S6	Help pupils to feel less worried about speaking English in class.	0%	1.6%	14.1%	46.9%	37.5%
S4	Assist pupils in speaking in English during formal and informal settings.	0%	0%	18.8%	45.3%	35.9%
S5	Assist pupils in speaking with appropriate grammatical structure.	0%	7.8%	20.3%	45.3%	26.6%

Based on the results of data analysis, these pre-service teachers believed that English comic strips could assist them in improving elementary school students' speaking skills and that this technique could build a better foundation for pupils' speaking proficiency. According to the data, most respondents agreed that reading aloud activities using English comics can help students speak basic phrases; 50.0% (n=32) of respondents believed it was effective, while 42.2% (n=27) believed it was extremely effective. In addition, it is demonstrated that English comics help overcome reluctance during English conversation, with 43.8% (n=28) believing it was effective and 42.2% (n=27) very effective. Based on Table 4, the total accumulative for 'effective' and 'very effective' have the majority proportion for all items inquiring into these pre-service teachers' views of using English comics to improve speaking skills. According to pre-service teachers, it made students feel more at ease when speaking English in class and motivated them to participate actively. The pre-service teachers also believed using comics could make students feel less intimidated to speak English in class. Furthermore, 81.2% and 71.9% of respondents, respectively, agreed that using

this teaching resource would help students interact in English in both formal and casual settings and speak with appropriate grammatical structure.

According to [Mohtar et al. \(2015\)](#), the issue of students' lack of English competence has been emphasised and debated, and speaking English as a second language is undoubtedly one of the language skills that they lack. This is due to the weak foundation established at the primary level as one of the factors. Cartoonists commonly aim to mimic the experience and speak English in an informal tone in comic strips, and this type of material has colloquial dialogues within the pages, resulting in the improvement of spoken English abilities. Nevertheless, according to the findings of [Klau's \(2015\)](#) study, it was found that using English comics sparked the students' interest and motivated them to learn English. As a result, the students were more eager to participate in the teaching-learning process and speak up in class. Additionally, the students involved in the experiment of the study began to become more conscious of their pronunciation when speaking. Similar findings can also be found in [Nuarita \(2015\)](#), in which the researcher used English comic strip stories to improve the students' speaking ability. The findings revealed that using visual arts, such as English comic strips, to teach speaking skills effectively encouraged students to participate more actively in the learning environment and helped them become more confident speakers.

#### 4.2.3 *Listening skills*

Table 5 presents the pre-service teachers' perception of using English comics to increase elementary school pupils' listening skills.

**Table 5.** Perception towards the usage of English comics to increase listening skills.

Item		Percentage %				
		Not effective at all	Less effective	Not Sure	Effective	Very Effective
L4	Help pupils comprehend words that are most frequently used in the topics that are immediately relevant to them personally (e.g., fundamental knowledge of one's self and family, shopping, the geography of the area, and occupation).	0%	0%	12.5%	53.1%	34.3%
L5	Assist pupils in drawing inferences based on what they have listened.	0%	0%	20.3%	42.2%	37.5%
L6	Encourage pupils to be attentive listeners.	0%	3.1%	14.1%	45.3%	37.5%
L7	Motivate pupils to participate actively in listening assessment.	0%	1.6%	12.5%	43.8%	42.2%
L2	Explain or support pupils' understanding of what they have listened.	0%	1.6%	14.1%	54.7%	29.7%



Table 5 continued...

L1	Assist pupils in identifying the main ideas of what they have listened.	0%	1.6%	15.6%	53.1%	29.7%
L3	Help increase listening comprehension.	0%	3.1%	15.6%	53.1%	28.1%

Listening skills were the third most positively viewed language skill that could be improved by using English comics in teaching and learning English in class. Based on Table 5, the total responses for ‘effective’ and ‘very effective’ occupied the majority proportion for all items inquiring into these pre-service teachers’ views of using English comics to improve listening abilities. According to the data, respondents believed that using English comics was significant in helping students understand phrases and listen to the most frequently used language connected to topics of the most immediate personal importance, particularly simple words and phrases that can be used in daily conversation. Many respondents (53.1%) believed it was effective, while 34.3% believed it was extremely effective.

The total number of respondents choosing ‘effective’ and ‘very effective’ were 82.8% agreeing that using English comics in teaching and learning practices would inspire students to be active listeners, and 86% of respondents believed that English comics could encourage them to fully engage in the listening practices. In addition, 84.4% of respondents agreed that when students participated in a read-aloud exercise in class using English comics, visuals from English comics might effectively help students understand what they were listening. Finally, 81.2% and 82.8% of respondents, respectively, understood that using English comics helped students identify important ideas and facilitate comprehension of what they have heard.

#### 4.2.4 Writing skills

Table 6 presents the pre-service teachers’ perception of using English comics to increase elementary school pupils’ writing skills.

**Table 6.** Perception towards the usage of English comics to increase writing skills.

Item		Percentage %				
		Not effective at all	Less effective	Not Sure	Effective	Very Effective
W6	Expose pupils to a range of interesting vocabulary.	0%	0%	14.1%	40.6%	45.3%
W5	Help pupils to write narrative texts.	0%	3.1%	18.8%	48.4%	29.7%
W2	Assist pupils in writing a variety of sentence structures in English.	0%	3.1%	23.4%	42.2%	31.3%
W7	Motivate pupils to participate actively in writing assessments.	0%	3.1%	25.0%	40.6%	31.3%
W1	Assist pupils in writing using appropriate spelling, capitalisation, and punctuation.	3.1%	3.1%	21.9%	37.5%	34.4%

Table 6 continued...

W4	Assist pupils in logically organising their ideas when writing a paragraph.	0%	3.1%	25.0%	45.3%	26.6%
W3	Assist pupils in writing an outline to logically organise their ideas before writing.	0%	3.1%	29.7%	42.2%	25.0%

According to the data, using English comics to improve writing abilities was the respondents' least favourably evaluated language skill. The majority of respondents – 40.6% – thought that English caricatures were very helpful in exposing primary students to a wide range of vocabulary that could help them in their writing, while 45.3% believed that they were highly effective. Following this, it reveals that English comics helped students write narrative texts, with a proportion of respondents (n=31) who believed it to be 48.4% effective and 29.7% highly effective. This is supported by a study by [Gorjian and Branch \(2016\)](#), who found that using English comics can be helpful for students to practise using different verb tenses (for instance, by altering the past tense of the action strip to the present tense). According to 42.2% (n=27) of respondents, the use of English comics was also effective in helping students produce a variety of English sentence forms and highly effective according to another 31.3% (n=20) of respondents.

In addition, these pre-service teachers felt that English comics might encourage pupils to actively engage in writing activities and utilise appropriate English spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation, with the same overall total of respondents picking “effective” and “very effective” of 71.9%. A large proportion of pre-service teachers' also felt that employing English comics in classes could help pupils organise their ideas logically when writing a paragraph and helped them construct better outlines before composing essays with a total number of respondents choosing ‘effective’ and ‘very effective’ of 71.9%. and 67.2, respectively. This is in line with [Krashen's \(2004\)](#) assertion that reading can improve one's literacy and writing skills, and it is congruent with the findings of [Rani \(2016\)](#), who found that English comics may enhance free handwriting, enable students to write with less grammatical errors, and help them write systematically. As a result, most respondents believed reading English comics helped students enhance their writing abilities.

The data also revealed a comparable quantity of respondents choosing ‘not sure,’ ranging from 14.1% to 29.7% on using English comics to enhance students' writing abilities. Respondents were unlikely to recognise how English comics might improve their writing skills as effectively as English reading, speaking and listening skills. Table 7 describes the overall item mean score for the second research question.

**Table 7.** Overall items mean scores on the perceptions of the effectiveness of English comics to help enhance students' English language skills.

Variables	Frequency of variables selected / (number of respondent x number of items) x 100	Total Summary %
1. Not effective	2/1792 x100	0.11%
2. Somehow effective	32/1792 x100	1.79%
3. Not Sure	292/1792 x100	16.29%
4. Effective	802/1792 x100	44.75%
5. Very effective	664/1792x100	37.05%

Based on summary ratings for the second research question, containing 28 items that were developed to reflect the whole dimension of discussion, it was found that 64 respondents chose “not effective” and “somewhat effective,” which obtained the lowest percentages of 0.11% and 1.79%, respectively. As shown in Table 7, 16.29% of respondents were unsure of how English comics could improve students’ English skills, and this might be related to the results of earlier research questions, which demonstrated the inadequacy of the exposure these pre-service teachers received while pursuing their diploma. Nevertheless, most respondents selected “effective” and “very effective,” suggesting that these pre-service teachers had favourable impressions of using English comics to enhance pupils’ English skills. The combined percentages for “effective” and “very effective” were 81.8%, demonstrating that these pre-service teachers believed that English comics were effective in improving their learners’ English language skills.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The main objective of the study was to determine the perceptions of pre-service elementary school teachers related to the use of English comics in the classroom. Meanwhile, the secondary objective was to find out how pre-service elementary school teachers view the effectiveness of English comics in helping learners improve their English language skills. According to the results of the questionnaire designed to address the primary research objective, 68.8% of pre-service teachers were introduced to English comics during their teacher training before beginning their teaching practice; however, 45.3% of those respondents agreed that they only learned it briefly during their training. The respondents showed positive opinions regarding English comics since 70.3% of them already shared comics with their pupils ranging from once per month to a regular basis. Only 1.6% of those surveyed said they would never utilise English comics in the classroom, while the remaining 98.4% expressed interest in using the resources to teach the language.

Meanwhile, according to the responses to the questionnaire aimed at achieving the second research objective, the total mean score of the four English skills, ranging from 4.03 to 4.28, indicated that reading skill had the highest mean, followed by speaking skill. Meanwhile, listening skill was ranked third, and writing was ranked last. Overall, the findings revealed that most ESL pre-service elementary school teachers involved in this study supported using English comic books in education settings and showed positive views of English comics as tools to help improve pupils’ English skills. However, greater exposure to these media was necessary throughout their TESL diploma before starting their teaching practice, particularly since many respondents expressed an interest in employing English comics as a teaching tool but needed to figure out how to integrate them when teaching the language. Once these pre-service teachers are equipped with formal education on utilising English comics as teaching tools, they can manipulate instructional techniques and ideas when utilising English comics as a teaching tool in their classroom setting.

However, this study has several drawbacks, the most prominent of which is the small sample size – 64 pre-service elementary school teachers from one of the colleges in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, excluding 11 participants involved in the pilot study. Although the findings can generate a certain presupposition, it is unwise to make

generalisations that apply to all pre-service elementary school teachers, and the result can only be used within this specific demographic. In addition, the findings of this study cannot be generalised since it is challenging to locate an equivalent number of pre-service elementary school teachers that fall under the same age, racial, and gender categories, as well as those who teach at a level and in a year that is comparable to their current year. As evidenced by the statistics, most respondents were females and predominantly Malay. As a result, the perspectives of different genders and nationalities cannot be fully explored. Finally, because the research instrument was designed to assess pre-service elementary school teachers' perceptions, this study cannot verify if English comics may actually improve Malaysian elementary school students' English language skills. According to the conclusions of the data interpretation, an additional study on pre-service teachers from different universities may be proposed to discover if there are any differences or similarities in their views regarding the use of English comics and the effectiveness of English comics in helping elementary school students enhance their English language skills. Because the present study concentrated on the perception of pre-service elementary school teachers, additional research, such as experimental studies that focus on investigating the effectiveness of employing English comics as a teaching and learning tool in enhancing elementary school students' English language skills, should be conducted.

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