JEL Journal of English Language and Linguistics
Vol. 6 No. 2 (May–August) 2025
ISSN:2730-2431 (Print)
ISSN:2821-952x (Online)

Investigating English Personal Experience Narrative Texts of Thai Learners of English as a Foreign Language

Donlaporn Rojsatitpong[1*], Sakulrat Worathumrong[2]
[1]*Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand*
[2]*Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand*

APA Citation:
Rojsatitpong, D., & Worathumrong, S. (2025). Investigating English personal experience narrative texts of Thai learners of English as a foreign language. *Journal of English Language and Linguistics, 6*(2), 150-168. https://doi.org/10.62819/jel.2025.1072

Received: May 7, 2025
Revised: June 5, 2025
Accepted: June 14, 2025

Abstract

This study examines English personal experience narratives written by Thai EFL learners of varying proficiency levels at Prasarnmit Demonstration School (Secondary) in Thailand, comparing their use of narrative elements. Based on TU-SET scores, 45 Thai EFL learners, with 15 in each group, were divided into three sample groups of beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. They wrote 250-word English narrative texts on their selected topic. Using Labov and Waletzky's (1967) and Labov's (1972) framework of narrative structures, six elements were found: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. The findings reveal that the evaluation was the most prominent element across all groups. The difference was in the abstract and coda, as they were the least frequently used. The advanced learners employed the abstract more frequently than the other sample groups. The use of evaluation highlights the credibility of English narrative writing that the events narrated occurred. The least frequently used abstract and coda among the sample groups suggests that a narrative storyline was relatively simple across all groups. The highlight of the evaluation element underscores how Thai EFL learners would use narrative structure for academic writing or online posts and produce more effective narrative writing or a more popular post. Pedagogically, the findings may be used to prepare Thai secondary school EFL learners to focus on audience attraction in their writing and assist educators in designing assessment rubrics that emphasize this element to promote more engaging narrative writing.

Keywords: English narratives, narrative structures, narrative elements, personal experience texts, Thai EFL learners

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: donlaporn.roj@gmail.com

Introduction

Grossman (2025) stresses the World Economic Forum webpage that storytelling through ancient cave drawings to written narratives has reflected how 'humans make sense of the world and organize information'. How people organize information to tell a story is a fundamental aspect of daily life (Van De Mieroop, 2021, as cited in Bao, 2024) in conveying fictional or non-fictional narratives, especially from personal experiences. Narratives can be defined through two aspects. One is from the temporal aspect as a description of or a way of explaining a sequence of events or connected sequence of events to illustrate a set of aims or values or to tell the story recounted by narrators to narratees (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, n.d.; The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, n.d.). Another is from the spatial aspect, where a physical location or setting of events adds to the story's meaning. A mixture of these suggests that narratives, either spoken or written, are important discourse phenomena that make humans' narrative stories informative, meaningful, and appealing to listeners or readers of the narrative texts. Although individuals have unique personal experiences and could report their past events with a variety of linguistic features, Labov and Waletzky's (1967) and Labov's (1972) proposed frameworks of narrative structures of personal experience which have proved to be useful in approaching a wide variety of written narrative situations, such as first-person narratives, authorial narratives, or figural narratives.

For English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, having a strong command of English narrative writing or texts is of utmost importance in the development of their English communication skills in this digital multicultural landscape. How they report and organize their personal experiences in both temporal and spatial aspects could imply more than just the communication of English lexical units or morphosyntactic forms (e.g., Mora et al., 2021). It entails the learners' proficient writing of the narrative genre which reflects their capacity to engage with language as a meaningful, textual entity that extends beyond words and sentences (Bachman, 1990) by reporting their stories in sequential, consecutive orders (e.g., Labov, 1972, 1997, 2014; Westby & Culatta, 2016) and attracts the audience. How do EFL learners express their personal experiences through their English narrative writing or texts?

Several studies of narrative elements in written productions highlight variations in how EFL learners structure their narratives (e.g., Allami & Ramezanian, 2021; Devanadera, 2018; Madu, 2024). Allami and Ramezanian (2021) examined oral and written English narratives from pre- and upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners. For the written narratives, the evaluation emerged as the most common element in the narratives of both groups, while the abstract and coda were excluded. Devanadera (2018) found that Filipino and Vietnamese college students narrated their stories by providing the story settings, introducing the situation, and narrating events. Madu (2024) studied Indonesian EFL university students and reported that orientation, complicating action, and resolution were the elements exhibited most in their narratives, whereas the coda required improvement. Previous studies have tended to overlook a deeper investigation of English personal experience narrative texts based on English proficiency levels , especially in the secondary school context.

In many secondary schools in Thailand, like some other EFL countries, such as Indonesia (e.g., Toba, Noor, & Sanu, 2019) and Vietnam (e.g., Dao & Dan, 2024), narrative texts, such as paragraph writing or compositions, are assessed for writing tests and not specifically for writing performance or continuing writing tasks as part of lifelong learning skills. English writing in this particular genre has been taught and assessed based on the two main levels. One is at a general macrostructure level of an essay or paragraph writing which involves an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Another is at a microstructure level or how the learners accurately use grammar, vocabulary, and cohesive devices for their stories. Thus, Thai EFL learners usually produce their narrative texts based on these assessments, especially on the microstructure level as if the narrative tasks are extended grammar lessons (e.g., Nguyen & Suwannabubpha, 2022) to meet English academic standards in accuracy. When the current English writing practice environment in Thailand is still exam-oriented and grammar-focused, Thai EFL learners find generating texts and elaborating on ideas for narrative writing difficult. Due to the lack of a deeper insight into English personal experience narratives produced by EFL secondary school learners at different proficiency levels, this study aims to bridge this gap by focusing on exploring English narrative texts written by Thai secondary school EFL learners across proficiency levels. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how Thai EFL learners develop narrative competence beyond grammar and generic structures, offering guidance for teachers in designing clearer, more effective assessment rubrics for instructing and scoring English personal experience narrative texts.

Literature Review

1. The Labovian Narrative Model of Analysis and English Narrative Texts

Many scholars have studied English narrative texts, such as paragraph writing, compositions, and essays extensively to examine text structure, discourse and cohesive devices produced by EFL learners (e.g., Bao, 2024; Siekmann et al., 2022; Wang, 2019). To comprehend how unique personal experiences or stories of individuals' past events are constructed through a variety of linguistic features (e.g., the use of repetitions, intensifiers, or modifiers), Labov and Waletzky (1967) proposed a key narrative structure involving the three sequential elements: the orientation, the complicating action, and the evaluation. Later, Labov (1972) refined this proposed structure to include additional elements: the abstract, the resolution, and the coda. The six sequential elements are as follows:

- •Abstract: an introductory part of the narrative that summarizes the story.
- • Orientation: information about the time, place of the events, and the participants in the events. It is usually placed at the beginning of the story, but sometimes is introduced later on
- • Complicating action: sequential clauses that lead up to the story's climax, typically the most extensive section.
- • Evaluation: expression of the narrator's attitudes or opinions to make the point of the narrative.
- • Resolution: how things finally happened in the event or story.
- • Coda: a final clause to show that the narrative has ended, which brings the reader back to the present.

(1) One of my favorite childhood activities was building forts with my friends. We would use whatever we could find around the house or yard like sheets, chairs, pillows, and sometimes even cardboard boxes to create our own hideaways. These forts weren't just piles of blankets and furniture to us; they were secret castles, pirate ships, and even spaceships. Once the fort was built, we would spend hours imagining different stories. One of my friends would sometimes even bring snacks to share, which made the whole experience feel even more special. Our forts became spaces where we could act out any adventure we could think of, and each time we built one, it seemed like a completely new world. As I got older, I realized that building forts wasn't just about having fun; it was also a way for us to practice teamwork and creativity. We learned to share materials, come up with ideas together, and solve problems like how to make the fort big enough for everyone. These simple experiences also made us feel a sense of accomplishment, as though we had created something entirely our own. Looking back now, I feel grateful for those times. It's funny to think about how a few pillows and blankets could transform an ordinary day into something extraordinary. Fort-building was not only my favorite childhood activity but also a foundation for memories that taught me the value of imagination, friendship, and cooperation—lessons that have stuck with me ever since.

As in (1), the narrative text starts with an abstract to introduce the story, as in '*One of my favorite childhood activities was building forts*.' The orientation introduces friends, household items like sheets and pillows, and the backyard as the setting. The complicating action describes imaginative play: forts became castles, pirate ships, and spaceships. In the evaluation, the narrator realizes that fort-building taught teamwork and creativity. The resolution shows how these moments brought a sense of accomplishment. Lastly, the coda, '*Looking back now, I feel grateful*…', shows how these memories shaped values like imagination, friendship, and cooperation.

When the six sequential elements are presented in a narrative, it is what Labov (1972) called a '*completely developed narrative*' (p. 360). However, not all six elements are necessary for every narrative. Sheikh et al. (2021) further elaborated that some written narratives may not contain an abstract or a coda. The three key elements, which are the orientation, the complicating action, and the evaluation, are sufficient for a narrative (Ouyang & McKeown, 2014) as '*minimal narrative*' (Labov, 1972, p. 360) which consists of a series of two clauses that are chronologically ordered and causally related as exhibited in (2):

(2) a. I knew a girl named Lisa.
b. Another girl threw a bottle of water at her right in the head.
c. And she had a bruise on her forehead.

The minimal narrative in (2) contains three clauses, but only (b) and (c) are narrative clauses, considering temporal order. Clause a is considered a '*free clause*' (Labov, 1972, p. 360) and can be placed after clauses (b) or (c) because it is not confined by any temporal juncture.

Interestingly, the evaluation element can be dynamic or floating depending on different purposes. Based on Afsar (2006), the two purposes could involve (1) narrator-oriented purpose, in which the narrator or storyteller presents themselves in the best light possible; (2) story-oriented purpose, in which the narrator or storyteller emphasizes or adds the point for the complication to reach its peak. Labov (1972, 2014) also stressed that evaluation occurs before the resolution and could be dispersed across the narrative.

(3) I was very fortunate growing up I had a very pleasant childhood. My stand-out memories of a childhood activity is very simple. We walked through the green fields past a giant angry looking bull ... A nice familiar routine walking through the woods and then back home, stopping for a Sunday paper at the local village shop and maybe a few sweets if we were lucky. … These are my happiest childhood memories and my favourite activities when I was younger.

In (3), it highlights the dispersion of the evaluation element throughout the narrative. Evaluation in the narrative is gently dispersed throughout, beginning with the narrator's reflection on how the narrator was very fortunate to have a pleasant childhood. It continues with phrases like '*stand-out memories*' and '*most fun times*,' adding emotional significance to simple walks. Words like '*nice*' and '*familiar*' convey warmth, and the closing line—'*my happiest childhood memories*'—provides a clear, explicit evaluation, highlighting the lasting joy of these moments.

2. Topic Selection

Topic selection greatly affects EFL learners' writing. Personally interesting topics improve idea development by tapping into prior knowledge and experience (Özdemir & Karafil, 2023). Self-selected topics boost fluency and content (Delve, 2023), while if they are not strongly familiar with topics, it can hinder writing (Hyland, 2019). However, some learners struggle to choose topics under pressure (Sponseller & Wilkins, 2015). Teacher-selected topics still support structured writing (Bonyadi, 2014). For these reasons, the current study included personal experience topics to promote authentic, emotionally engaging, and accessible writing for learners.

Research Objective

To investigate the elements of English personal experience narrative texts among Thai secondary school EFL learners of beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of English proficiency to understand how narrative competence develops across different English proficiency levels

Research Question

To what extent do Thai secondary school EFL learners at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of English proficiency apply narrative elements in their English personal experience narrative texts?

Hypothesis of the Study

Based on the narrative model by Labov and Waletzky (1967, 1972) and Davis (2022), Thai EFL learners at the beginner level of English proficiency are likely to exhibit the narrative elements with limited application, while the intermediate learners will show partial but growing use of the elements. For the advanced learners, they will apply a more consistent and complete use of all six narrative elements in their English personal narrative texts.

Methodology

1. Research Design

In this study, exploratory mixed methods were employed to examine the narrative elements found in English narrative personal experience texts of Thai EFL learners. The first phase was the quantitative phase to determine the frequency of narrative elements of the narrative texts statistically. The second phase was the qualitative phase to investigate the narrative elements of the narrative texts, using Labov and Waletzky's (1967) and Labov's (1972) framework. This approach allows the quantitative results to inform and support qualitative analysis, facilitating a deeper understanding of the development of narrative competence across proficiency levels.

2. Population and Samples

The study involved a total of 115 Thai EFL students in grades 10 and 11 from Prasarnmit Demonstration School (Secondary) in Thailand during the 2024 academic year. The school was selected due to its vision and identity, which emphasize academic excellence and promote multiple intelligences among students, including English language skills. Therefore, the ability to write effectively in English is considered highly important. The participants enrolled in the Advanced English Reading and Writing I course, which aimed to enhance the students' reading and writing skills. They were taught paragraph structure and submitted informed consent before participating in the study. To stratify sample groups, the 115 participants were asked to take the TU-SET standardized English proficiency assessment, developed by the Language Institute of Thammasat University in Thailand. The test evaluates learners' English proficiency across four skill areas: listening, reading, writing, and language use (grammar and vocabulary). It is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), making it suitable for categorizing learners into beginner (A1) to advanced (C1/C2). The test is widely used in Thai educational contexts, particularly in secondary and tertiary institutions, due to its practicality, accessibility, and contextual relevance to Thai learners. In this study, the TU-SET was selected because it offers a standardized, locally accessible, and cost-free tool provided by the school to stratify learners into three proficiency levels. Based on their scores,

45 participants were selected as sample groups: 15 advanced-level English learners (AELs) with scores ranging from 80 to 100, 15 intermediate-level English learners (IELs) with scores ranging from 60 to 79, and 15 beginner-level English learners (BELs) with scores ranging from 0 to 59.

3. Instrument and Procedures

Apart from the use of the TU-SET test to stratify the sample groups, all sample groups were asked to complete an online survey via Google Forms to explore ten topics related to childhood memories, memorable events, and influential figures. This helps identify their preferred personal experience narrative writing topics to reduce potential anxiety, encourage authentic self-expression, and minimize the influence of unfamiliar content, thus allowing students to focus on narrative construction rather than topic comprehension. The three most frequently selected topics were incorporated into the writing task instructions: My Favorite Childhood Activity, My Favorite Role Model I Have Met, and My Experience in Love and Heartbreak. This reflects that the sample groups prefer to share their past personal experiences about their affective memories, memorable events, and influential figures.

4. Data Collection

TU-SET scores were collected and analyzed to divide the learners into three groups based on English proficiency: AELs, IELs, and BELs. At the same time, the participants were given an online survey requiring them to choose the most interesting topic. After receiving instruction on paragraph structure, they were required to write a 250-word English personal experience narrative within one hour during class time. They chose one topic from the three most selected options provided. To ensure an accurate assessment of English writing proficiency, they were prohibited from using dictionaries or AI tools such as ChatGPT and QuillBot. A total of 45 texts were used for analysis. The texts containing fewer than 250 words were excluded to ensure consistency in text length, which is essential for a fair comparison of narrative element usage across proficiency levels.

5. *Data Analysis*

As the Labovian narrative model was initially designed for oral narratives, the model in this study was adapted and employed to analyze written narratives, as shown in Table 1. For the introduction part, six attention-grabbing devices proposed by Davis (2022) could be considered as the abstract, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Framework of Analysis for Narrative Structure and Elements Found in the Thai Secondary School EFL Learners Adapted from Labov and Waletzky (1967, 1972) and Davis (2022)

Major categories	Subcategories	Examples from tokens of native English speakers and Thai EFL learners
Introduction	**Abstract**	
	1) Questions	Did you have a favorite game or toy you never got tired of as a child? Have you ever had heartache in your life before?
	2) Direct statements	I am going to tell you about my first love. My favorite role model that I've met is Jennie from BLACKPINK.
	3) Metaphors/ Similes	Her voice hit me like sunlight breaking through a cloudy sky.
	4) Quotations	Gorge Bernard Shaw once wrote, "*Those who can…do. Those who cannot…teach*."
Body	**1. Orientation**	
	1) Characters	*I* would like to played Ping Pong with *my grandpa* and *my brother*.
	2) Place	My first country that I go with my friends is *Singapore*.
	3) Time	one day, later, one morning, one summer
	2. Complicating action	
	1) Main events	We did everything together like play game,…*Then*, we grew up. *First*, I fell in love with her. … *At that time* I was really happy.
	2) Challenges or problems	At the week, I have lost the person I have been knowing for years

Table 1 (Continued)

Major categories	Subcategories	Examples from tokens of native English speakers and Thai EFL learners
Body (Continued)	**3. Evaluation**	
	1) Intensifiers	I was *very* happy. We were *so* tired. The entire day will be *full of* joy
	2) Comparisons	
	Negative expressions	We *don't* talk anymore.
	Future indicators	Nothing it *is going to be* like what we expect.
	Modal verbs	I *can* played any song.
	Superlatives	She was *the best* rapper.
	Comparatives	He started feeling for me *more than* friend.
	Questions	Do you like it? After all, it's not that big of a deal, right?
	Imperatives	Don't tell my mom., Be quiet.
	3) Correlative clauses	While she *was performing* on the stage, she was the best rapper I have ever met. It make me feel *exciting*.
	4) Explicative clauses	I went to my neighbor's house every day *because* I liked to play Minecraft together
	4. Resolution	
	1) The outcome of the story	*In the end*, we made it home safely. We *finally* decided to go back being friends
	2) The solution to the problem	I failed my first driving test, so I practiced every weekend. After a month, I passed the test with flying colors.
Conclusion	**Coda**	
	1) Summary	To sum everything up, my favorite childhood activity was spending countless hours at the playground. And that's it for my experience in love and heartache story
	2) Reflection	I've learned a lot from that experience, and it has shaped who I am today.

The *abstract* introduces the story to grab the readers' attention. It includes four subcategories. Questions could be rhetorical, provoking the readers to think along and answer them in their minds. Direct statements clearly inform the readers what the story will be about. Metaphors or

similes compare the topic with something unrelated to invite the readers to wonder why it is a topic. Quotations refer to famous or individual quotes related to the story.

The *orientation* includes *characters*: the participants involved in the story, *place*: the setting where the story occurs, and *time*: indicators that establish the time the event occurs. The *complicating action* means the main events or challenges within the story, arranged by temporal or sequential markers such as *first*, *then,* and *yesterday*.

The *evaluation* contains four subcategories. *Intensifiers* could be quantifiers, adverbs of degree, and repetition to emphasize particular events and amplify actions. *Comparisons* are used to compare actual events with those that did not occur, could have occurred, or may occur in the future. They could include seven subcategories. Negative expressions reflect negative emotions or judgments toward events while the narrative is still in progress. Future indicators are used when talking about the future. Modal verbs express certainty, possibility, or obligation, which can suggest evaluation. While comparatives compare two things, showing how one has more or less of a particular quality than the other, superlatives indicate one thing has the highest or lowest degree of a quality among others. Questions could be rhetorical, and do not appear at the beginning of the narrative. It could also be overt questions to encourage direct evaluation from the readers. Imperatives are statements expressing the narrator's judgment, lesson, or emotional stance drawn from the experience. *Correlative clauses* refer to a progressive *-ing* clause showing the continued events, and a participle modifying and evaluating events by describing the state of an object or character during the action, while *explicative clauses* explain a previous statement or idea, providing additional details.

The *resolution* explains the solution to the problem or the outcome of the story. Finally, the *coda* could include a summary of the main points or themes of the story, and a reflection that highlights a lesson the narrator has learned from their personal experience.

In this study, the findings were reviewed by three experts in English linguistics and communication. Each expert analyzed the English narrative texts using the established framework and evaluated the alignment of the narrative elements with the research objective. To ensure content validity, the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was employed, with all items reviewed for clarity and relevance. Then, the experts assessed the level of agreement, and any discrepancies were discussed to reach a consensus. In the following section, the results and discussions are presented.

Results and Discussion

Narrative Elements of the English Personal Experience Narrative Texts of the Thai Secondary School EFL Learners

A total of 627 tokens of all narrative elements were found in 45 English personal experience narrative texts written by the AELs, IELs, and BELs. The six elements produced by the sample groups were illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

The Six Narrative Elements in English Personal Experience Narrative Texts Produced by the Thai Secondary School EFL Learners

Narrative elements	Sample groups							
	AELs		IELs		BELs		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	N	%
Evaluation	100	15.95	84	13.39	86	13.71	270	43.07
Complicating action	65	10.37	56	8.93	60	9.57	192	28.87
Orientation	28	4.47	20	3.19	18	2.87	73	10.53
Resolution	16	2.55	15	2.39	15	2.39	49	7.33
Abstract	14	2.23	12	1.91	12	1.91	39	6.25
Coda	10	1.59	12	1.91	6	0.96	31	4.46
Total	233	37.16	199	31.73	197	31.41	627	100

In Table 2, the application of narrative elements varied across the three proficiency levels. The evaluation element was the most commonly used by all groups, with AELs showing the highest use (15.95%), followed by BELs (13.71%), and IELs (13.39%). This suggests a strong tendency among the groups to include personal opinions or emotions in their narratives, regardless of proficiency. The findings correspond with the study of Allami and Ramezanian (2019), which reported that the evaluation element was frequently presented in English written narratives produced by EFL learners. The evaluation was also observed to be placed alongside other narrative elements, not only preceding the resolution, which emphasizes how it can occur throughout the narrative (Labov, 1972, 2014). The sample groups strongly expressed opinions and feelings towards the story to engage the readers and lead them to gain a deeper understanding of the narrators' personal experience. This reflects a narrator-oriented purpose since the narrator depicts themselves in the best light possible (Afsar 2006).

Similarly, the abstract and coda were the least frequently used. The abstract was specially employed among the AELs (2.23%). This reflects that higher-level learners tend to pay more attention to grabbing the readers' attention before narrating the story. The coda element was observed as the least present element in the BELs' texts, at 0.96%. Unlike the other groups, the IELs employed both elements equally, each at 1.91%. This suggests that intermediate learners are more inclined to either draw the readers' attention or include a closure or a personal takeaway to make the readers understand more easily. Overall, the sample groups mostly omitted these two elements. This emphasizes that the elements may not consistently be present in all written narratives (Sheikh et al., 2021). The following examples present each narrative element from each group.

1. Evaluation

Evaluation refers to the narrator's expression of feelings or viewpoints to highlight the meaning of the narrative. This study observed that it was the most frequently used out of the six narrative

elements. It normally follows the complicating action in which a series of main events or problems are narrated, and can also be dispersed throughout the text. In the body part of the texts, the evaluation was usually found. A closer look at the subcategories of the evaluation, the AELs and IELs similarly preferred explicative clauses, especially the *because*-clause. This indicates that higher proficiency learners seemed to explain the rationale behind their actions or opinions. However, intensifiers were more common in the BELs' texts, especially '*very*.' This suggests that they often rely on basic evaluative language to express emotions in their narratives. This may reflect their limited vocabulary range, prompting them to use simple, familiar words to convey intensity.

Additionally, the selected topics likely encouraged direct emotional expressions and personal opinions from all sample groups, as they involved personal experiences that were real, familiar, and emotionally meaningful. Writers can fluently convey their ideas when they are personally interested in or familiar with the topic (Bonyadi, 2014; Delve, 2023; Hyland, 2019; Özdemir & Karafil, 2023). Interestingly, the evaluation was found in the narratives related to love and heartache stories among the AELs and IELs. This suggests how affective memories of love and heartbreak influence how they evaluate stories. Meanwhile, the BELs tend to include evaluations of their childhood stories more. This reflects how they may feel emotionally connected to their childhood, encouraging them to reflect on what the experience meant to them. Some examples of evaluation are presented in (4) to (6).

(4) She was *really* nice to me and I could talk to her for a long time, casually without getting bored ... She *doesn't* think that I'm weird or different *because she accepted who I was*. (AEL11)

(5) When he asked me to take a picture with him, his friend said grab her shoulder. ... That made me feel really happy that he was a respectful man. He always be a person who respects me. My parents and his parents support my relationship because we tell our parents everything about our relationship. (IEL9)

(6) Everybody have childhood memory and have many activity that didn't do when grow up. Also, grow up is *very* tired. … Its *very* happy when I have to play a princess barbies with my cousin. Its *very* happy when I have someone play a princess barbies with. (BEL1)

In (4), AEL11 emotionally evaluated their meaningful relationship. They employed '*really*' to intensify appreciation towards the person's kindness. It implies feelings of comfort and a sense of being valued, especially the line, *"She doesn't think that I'm weird or different,"* revealing a deeper need for acceptance. The narrator also used '*because'* to explain their sense of comfort and connection with the person they were describing. This highlights that the narrator values being accepted for who they are. In (5), IEL9 used '*very'* to amplify emotions, alongside '*don't'* and '*but'* to contrast initial disbelief in love with a changed perspective. In (6), BEL1 placed the evaluation after the abstract and the orientation; the repeated use of *'very'* in this context enhances the evaluation function by emphasizing how much the narrator valued the shared playtime with someone else.

2. Complicating Action

Complicating action is the second most preferred element in the body part of the sample groups' texts, indicating that they were able to narrate their stories (Madu, 2024). This element consists of sequential clauses that typically present a series of main events, or a problem narrated in chronological order. Examples (7) to (9) illustrate how a problem and the key events were presented through this element.

(7) I broke up with her on our third month anniversary … I cried for months. (AEL14)

(8) My senior told him that she is my senior and she asked he like me. But my boyfriend said no but she is kinda cute. *Three days later*, my senior called me and my boyfriend to go to her. … I don't know why but that made me feel like I was an angel. *Two days later*, he followed me on Instagram. *Next day*, I had a competition so he texted me to see how was my competition. *After that day*, we talked together but not much ... (IEL8)

(9) My favorite role model I've met is my favorite actor and singer that I've met last month. … at Queen Sirikit National Convention Center. … I've met P'Ink Waruntorn *first* at the back of stage. *The next* singer that I've met is P'Nanon. *The last singer* that I've met is P'Nont Tanont. He is famous from The Voice Thailand Season One. (BEL8)

In (7), AEL14 introduced a conflict to describe the emotional impact of a romantic breakup, which led to months of crying. Furthermore, in (8), IEL18 structured the sequence of main events using temporal markers such as '*Three days later', 'Two days later',* and '*After that day'*. These markers guided readers through key moments in the relationship's progression, from the initial meeting to their growing connection through social media and subsequent conversations. Lastly, in (9), BEL8 recounted the significant moments of meeting her role models at a concert. The narrator used markers such as '*first'*, '*the next'*, and '*the last'* to order the events. From these examples, the complicating action exhibited in the compositions of each sample group functions by narrating a series of main events or introducing a problem.

3. Orientation

Orientation was the third most frequent element in the texts of all groups. It typically occurs after the abstract, providing readers with participants, setting, time, and contextual details within the story. It helps establish the foundation of the story, guiding the reader into the narrative. All groups provided background information, especially the participants and time in the story, which aligns with the studies of Allami and Ramezanian (2019), Devanadera (2018), and Madu (2024). This implies that across proficiency levels can generally apply the orientation successfully, as exemplified in (10) to (12).

(10) I have experienced various kinds of love ... *Throwing back to 2020 during elementary school, I knew that love existed when I met my best friend; my one and only. We have met with each other since elementary school but we had never interacted with each other back then.* (AEL13)

(11) One of my favorite activities is when I was 7 year old. *It was a summer*

holiday after school and I had to stay with my grandma all day. (IEL4)

(12) I learn that my experience in love is my first love teached me to grow up. *Two years ago, I am with him for a year*. (BEL10)

In (10), AEL13 introduced their best friend and themselves before specifying the year 2020, when their love story began at school. Secondly, IEL4 provided key contextual details in (11), identifying the main characters and specifying when and where their love experience occurred. Lastly, (12) showed how BEL10 used the temporal phrase '*two years ago*' as a time marker to establish when the events occurred. The narrator also introduced the participants in the story by using the pronouns *'I'* for themselves and '*him'* for their boyfriend, setting the stage before narrating their relationship. Across all examples, the representatives of each sample group effectively established the participants, timeline, and place in their narratives.

4. *Resolution*

Resolution was the fourth most frequently used element, with many narrative texts ending their story with this element (Devanadera, 2018). This element provides a solution to the problem in the complicating action or explains the outcome of the story. It typically follows the evaluation, as in (13) to (15).

(13) Unfortunately, the restaurant had already closed when I got there. … He then called her to sign my book. … *She even brought a postcard from book and kindly gave it to me*. (AEL5)

(14) Sometimes, I still think about her and wonder why she disappeared. … *Now, I'm just focusing on becoming a better version of myself.* (IEL10)

(15) It have lots of difficult things such as strong waves, and pain in hands. *I kept practicing and won all my fears. Now, I can ride it comfortably and without worry like a pro.* (BEL1)

In (13), AEL5 narrated the main events about how they met their role model. Then the sentence "*She even brought a postcard from her book and kindly gave it to me*" shows the final interaction after meeting the writer. In (14), IEL10 highlighted the difficulty in moving on from a past relationship, in "*I still think about her and wonder why she disappeared.*" In (15), the narrator recounts learning to ride a jet ski, overcoming fear with the statement, "*I kept practicing and won all my fears*," and reflecting on their growth and mastery. Overall, it could be observed that the resolution does reflect how the problem is solved or what the outcome is.

5. Abstract

The use of the abstract ranked fifth among the others. Typically, it consists of a few clauses at the introduction part of the narratives, briefly summarizing the main plot. The abstract precedes the orientation, where the narrator provides details about the person, place, and time of the event. However, they did not always include this element to introduce their stories. This underscores how the abstract may not consistently be present in written narrative since it is optional (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Sheikh et al., 2021). However, the AELs appeared to use the abstract with higher frequency than the IELs and BELs. This reflects how the higher

proficiency group tends to grab the readers' attention before delving into the stories. Ouyang and McKeown (2014) also supported that a narrative could be formed by the orientation, the complicating action, and the evaluation. It could be the possible reason why not all narrative elements are required to construct a narrative.

Surprisingly, most AELs and BELs similarly used rhetorical questions to engage readers and introduce the theme in a personal and relatable way, despite their language competence. The IELs, in contrast, appeared to directly state a story summary. This reflects a preference for straightforwardness, suggesting they may prioritize content delivery over audience engagement. Examples of the abstract element are shown in (16) to (18).

(16) Have you ever had a daydream love and a nightmare heartbreak in one relationship? (AEL14)
(17) My favorite role model that I've met is Jennie from BLACKPINK. (IEL7)
(18) Do you believe in puppy love? (BEL8)

In (16), AEL14 introduced the story with a rhetorical question to invite the readers to reflect on their own experiences in love and heartbreak. This immediately created a personal connection to relate the readers more to the upcoming narrative. In (17), IEL7 briefly summarized what will unfold in the narration. They introduced their favorite role model, serving as a clear abstract of the narrative. It signals a personal story centered on admiration and influence. In (18), the BEL8 started the story with a rhetorical question, engaging the reader and introducing the theme of young or puppy love. The narrator set a personal and emotional tone to invite the readers into a firsthand account.

6. Coda

The coda was one of the least frequently used element. It typically follows the resolution and serves to mark the end of the story by offering the narrator's reflection such as lessons learned, and often linking past experiences to the present. The AELs often reflected what they had learned from the events, while the IELs ended their stories either with a summary of the main ideas or a reflection. For the BELs, they mostly provided a summary of the story as the closure. It could be possible that more proficient learners are more likely to use codas to convey more reflective and deeper insights, whereas less proficient learners merely mark the end of the story, as in (19) to (21).

(19) This taught me that we should never fall in love with the same person. ... We gotta letting go even if it means to come to the realization that some people are a part of your history, but not a part of your destiny. (AEL12)
(20) This experience has teached me that love takes more than just feeling. … It teached how I see love and relationships. (IEL10)
(21) And that's it for my experience in love and heartache story. (BEL12)

In (19), AEL14 shared a reflective insight gained from their love and heartbreak experience. They have learned a significant lesson about how to move on from past relationships and recognize that some individuals are meant to be part of one's history, not one's future. The use

of phrases like "*we should never fall in love with the same person"* and *"some people are a part of your history, but not a part of your destiny*" illustrates a universal truth drawn from personal experience. IEL10 in (20) not only closed the narrative but also offered a life lesson to emphasize the need to acknowledge that some people belong only in one's past. In (21), BEL12 indicated that the event ended, without revealing the narrator's thoughts or lessons learned. These examples illustrate how the coda functions as the story's conclusion, where a moral lesson enlightens the narrator.

Based on the findings, narrative elements help shape coherent and engaging personal experience narratives. Mastery of these elements not only enhances storytelling but also reflects broader writing skills like organization, coherence, and vocabulary use. Therefore, analyzing how learners employ narrative elements can shed light on their overall writing proficiency and inform targeted instructional strategies. The use of narrative elements among the three groups also revealed both shared and distinct patterns. The evaluation was the most employed element. However, the AELs and IELs commonly used explicative clauses such as because-clauses, while the BELs favored intensifiers like '*very'* to express emotions. All groups effectively used orientation and complicating action to provide background information and narrate key events. Similarly, the resolution appeared with comparable frequency across all levels. The AELs also employed the abstract more frequently than the other groups, often beginning with rhetorical questions, a feature also observed in BELs. In contrast, IELs tended to open with a direct summary. Regarding the coda, the AELs often included reflective insights, IELs combined a summary with reflection, and BELs typically ended with a summary. These patterns suggest a progression in narrative sophistication, with higher-proficiency learners demonstrating greater structural variety and linguistic depth in their English narratives of personal experience.

Conclusion

The findings reveal how the AELs, IELs, and BELs expressed their personal experiences through their English narrative texts. They prefer to share their past personal experiences about affective memories, memorable events, and influential figures. Their written narrative texts exhibit all six narrative elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda, with variations. The AELs applied a wider range of narrative elements more frequently, reflecting greater narrative competence. The IELs and BELs relied more heavily on evaluative and event-based content, with fewer structural elements. The evaluation appears to be the most prominent element across all groups. This could be because it allows them to express emotional depth and cognitive complexity. Unlike other elements, evaluation requires the narrator to reflect on events, make judgments, and convey personal significance which highlights the credibility of English narrative writing. It also invites more sophisticated language use, such as complex sentences, emotive vocabulary, and abstract expressions. The learners would use narrative structure for academic writing or online posts and produce more effective narrative writing or a more popular post. The learners can better convey the significance and emotional impact of their stories, making them more relatable and engaging to the readers. For English writing instructors, it is essential to provide learners with practical strategies to craft more engaging narrative texts that captivate readers. Given the emphasis on

the repeated use of evaluation in personal narratives, instructors should address this element to help improve first draft scores, which supports both assessment performance and long-term writing development. However, final drafts should still be assessed using standardized English writing rubrics to ensure alignment with academic standards.

Recommendations

1. Implications

The findings could be used to prepare Thai secondary school EFL learners to focus on writing strategies that attract the audience's attention. This could also help guide teachers to assess these learners' works with a clear rubric related to audience engagement. However, the study is still limited to a monocultural context. Additionally, the topic selection could be potentially biased. Variation in individual experiences could have affected narrative performance by influencing content richness, emotional depth, and motivation. Learners with vivid memories or stronger language skills likely produced more detailed texts, while others may have struggled with expression or engagement, resulting in inconsistencies in writing quality, length, and complexity across participants.

2. Further Studies

Further studies should include a larger and more diverse sample of EFL/ESL learners. Future research could investigate various writing genres to offer more comprehensible perspectives of narrative elements in English narrative texts. Further research could also explore evaluation functions in more complex writing tasks such as argumentative writing, which could guide English instructors in teaching more advanced writing skills in an EFL context. Further studies should consider incorporating a more controlled range of topics or additional contextual factors to better account for individual differences.

References

Allami, H., & Ramezanian, M. (2021). EFL learner's use of evaluation in oral and written narratives. *Teaching English Language*, *15*(1), 51-76. https://doi.org/10.22132/TEL.2021.129078

Afsar, A. (2006). A discourse and linguistic approach to biblical and Qur'ānic narrative. *Islamic* Studies*, 45*(4), 493-517. www.jstor.org/stable/20839038

Bao, Y. (2024). An investigation of Labov's narrative analysis model to continuation writing instructional design. *The EUrASEANs: Journal on Global Socio-Economic Dynamics*, *4*(47), 335-348. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35678/2539-5645.4(47).2024.335-348

Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language teaching*. Oxford UP.

Bonyadi, A. (2014). The effect of topic selection on EFL students' writing performance. *Sage Open, 4*(3), https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440145471

Dao, V. T. A., & Dan, T. C. (2024). Secondary school EFL students' difficulties and solutions to learning English paragraph writing. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics Studies, 7*(2), 82-117. http.//doi/org/10.46827/ejals.v7i2.552

Davis, S. (2022, July 14). *7 sensational essay hooks that Grab Readers' attention - academic writing success*. Academic Writing Success - Master the academic writing skills you need to succeed in school. https://www.academicwritingsuccess.com/7-sensational-essay-hooks/

Delve, M. (2023). Impact of topic selection on freewriting fluency in Japanese EFL classroom settings. *Kwansei Gakuin University Humanities Review*, *28*, 179-188.

Devanadera, A. C. (2018). Assessing Vietnamese EFL students' writing in the light of world Englishes. *Journal of English as an International Language, 13*, 88-105. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1246909

Grossman, M. (Jan. 7, 2025). Why storytelling is the key to success in the disruption era. *World Economic Forum*. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/storytelling-key-to-success-in-the-disruption-era/

Huh, M., & Lee, J. (2018). Task complexity and writing prompts and performance in EFL high school students' narrative writing. *English Teaching, 73*(4), 55-72. http.//doi/org/10.15858/engtea.73.4.201812.55

Hyland, K. (2019). *Second language writing*. (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.7.02nar

Labov, W. (2014). *The transformation of experience in narrative*. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds.), The discourse reader (3rd ed., pp. 200-212). Routledge.

Madu, F. J. (2024). Narrative text writing skills in PGSD Students. *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendas*, *10*(2), 307–317. https://doi.org/10.31949/jcp.v10i2.8866

Mora, P. A. F., Coyle, Y., & Becerra, J. A. S. (2021). Cohesion in young EFL learners' narrative writing: Correct and incorrect use of local cohesive ties. *Atlantis Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, *43*(1), June 2021, 154-177. http://doi.org/10.28914/Atlantis-2021-43.1.09

Nguyen, T. T. L., & Suwannabubpha, S. (2022). EFL writing curriculum, teaching and learning at upper-secondary schools in Thailand. MEXTESOL Journal, *46*(4), 1-11. http://doi/org/ 10.61871/mj.v46n4-17

Özdemir, O., & Karafil, B. (2023). Exploring the topic selection tendencies of university students in L2 writing: Topic selection tendencies of university students. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, *15*(1), 486-507. https://www.ijci.net/index.php/IJCI/article/view/1182

Ouyang. J., & McKeown, K. (2014). Towards automatic detection of narrative structure. *In Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC'14)*, pp. 4624–4631, Reykjavik, Iceland. European Language Resources Association (ELRA).

Sheikh, A. R., Awan, N. A., & Sheikh, F. R. (2021). The application of Labov's sociolinguistic model of narrative analysis to a short story: "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson. *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)*, *8*(1), 283–295

Siekmann, L., Parr, J. M., & Busse, V. (2022). Structure and coherence as challenges in composition: A study of assessing less proficient EFL writers' text quality. *Assessing Writing, 54,* 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2022.100672

Sponseller, A. C., & Wilkins, M. (2015). Investigating the impact of topic selection control on writing fluency. *Hiroshima Studies in Language and Language Education, 18*, 141-152.

Toba, R., Noor, W. N., & Sanu, L. O. (2019). The current issues of Indonesian EFL students' writing skills: Ability, problem, and reason in writing comparison and contrast essays. *Dinamika Ilmu, 19*(1), 57-73. http://doi/org/10.21093/di.v19i1.1506

Tobin, J. J., Wu, D. Y., & Davidson, D. H. (1989). *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China, and the United States*. Yale University Press.

Van De Mieroop, D. (2021). The narrative dimension models and exploration of various narrative genres. *Narrative Inquiry*, *31*(1): 4-27.

Wang, P. H. (2019, November). Incorporating sociolinguistic narrative model into EFL writing for testing purposes. *Proceedings of the 28th International Symposium on English Teaching*, Taipei, Taiwan 2019 (pp. 212-227).

Westby, C., & Culatta, B. (2016). Telling tales: Personal event narratives and life stories. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 47*(4), 260-282. https://doi.org/10.1044/2016_LSHSS-15-0073