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THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH COMIC MEDIA ON EIGHTH-GRADERS' READING MOTIVATION AND ABILITY AT SMPN 29 PADANG

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of English comic media on eighth-grade students' reading motivation and reading ability at SMPN 29 Padang. Comics were selected because their integration of visuals and text helps reduce cognitive load and increases student engagement compared to traditional text-based materials. This quantitative study employed a true experimental design with a post-test-only control group. Two classes selected through cluster random sampling participated in the research: VIII.1 (experimental, 31 students) and VIII.5 (control, 32 students). Students' reading ability was assessed through a validated post-test, while reading motivation was measured using a questionnaire covering eight dimensions based on Guthrie & Wigfield's framework: Grades-compliance, Involvement, Social Competition, Reading Work Avoidance, Curiosity, Recognition, and Efficacy. Independent Samples t-Test results revealed significant differences between groups for both reading ability ($p < 0.05$) and reading motivation ($p < 0.05$). The experimental group outperformed the control group, indicating that English comic media effectively enhances students' reading comprehension and motivation. These findings highlight the potential of comics as engaging and pedagogically beneficial materials for EFL reading instruction.
Keywords: *English comic media; reading motivation; reading ability.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a multifaceted process that involves decoding text, constructing meaning, and critically interpreting information. Proficient reading ability is essential for students' academic success and lifelong learning, as it supports comprehension across subject areas and builds fundamental cognitive skills (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, 2002). Reading also contributes to personal growth, cultural awareness, and critical thinking, which are crucial in modern education systems. As students progress through their schooling, strong reading skills become increasingly important for understanding complex academic materials (Anderson, 2003; Brown, 2004).

However, reading ability is essential—not only for academic achievement but also for language development—yet many Indonesian students continue to struggle, including those at SMPN 29 Padang. Students in this context face several interconnected challenges, such as low reading motivation, limited comprehension ability, and insufficient access to engaging and culturally relevant English reading materials. These issues are commonly reflected in difficulties identifying main ideas, interpreting key details, and sustaining interest when reading lengthy or unfamiliar texts. Such challenges are consistent with findings across Indonesian and international EFL settings, where students often experience low engagement and limited exposure to meaningful reading content (Julinar, 2019; Chu, 2020; Chatzikyriakidou & McCartney, 2022).

Motivation is a critical factor influencing students' reading development. Research has long emphasized that low reading motivation contributes directly to weak comprehension performance (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Watkins & Coffey, 2004). Recent studies similarly note that students who lack interest, confidence, or curiosity toward reading are less likely to engage

deeply with texts, resulting in superficial comprehension and limited vocabulary growth (Wang et al., 2022; Naura & Daulay, 2024). In many Indonesian schools, instructional approaches tend to emphasize rote learning and exam preparation, making reading activities feel tedious and disconnected from students' interests (Saputri et al., 2021; Hidayat et al., 2024). This tradition further contributes to declining motivation and prevents students from fully benefiting from reading instruction.

Given these challenges, schools require innovative and engaging learning media to improve both reading motivation and reading ability. One promising approach is the use of English comic media, which integrates visual and textual elements to support comprehension. Comics provide contextual clues through imagery, reduce cognitive load, and make reading more enjoyable for reluctant or struggling readers (Duncan & Smith, 2009; Liu, 2016; Yum et al., 2021). Visual narratives in comics also help students make meaning, infer context, and retain vocabulary more effectively than traditional text-heavy materials (Kölin, 2021; Schauer, 2022).

A growing body of research supports the effectiveness of comics in EFL and literacy instruction. Studies show that comic-based learning increases student engagement (Widya & Swondo, 2020; Cabrera & Beltrán, 2024), enhances vocabulary acquisition (Quinonez-Beltran, 2022; Prihatiningtyas & Seinsiani, 2025; Ruqoyyah, 2025), improves reading comprehension (Lestari et al., 2025; Solihati & Zulaiha, 2024; Ananda et al., 2024), and even boosts writing and multimodal literacy skills (Doepker et al., 2018; Moses & Reid, 2021). Digital and web-based comics have been shown to increase students' motivation by offering relatable characters, appealing visuals, and accessible language (Tekin & İlhan, 2025; Yuliani & Setiawan, 2024). These benefits suggest that comics are well-suited to address motivational and comprehension-related challenges in EFL contexts.

More importantly, recent research highlights that comics not only improve general motivation but can also strengthen reading-specific motivation, including reading interest, curiosity, and self-efficacy (Lam et al., 2017; Gutiérrez-Colón et al., 2023; Amral & Sumiharti, 2024). This is significant because many previous studies have focused on motivation broadly, without distinguishing reading motivation as a unique construct. Few studies specifically examine how comics affect reading motivation and reading ability simultaneously, especially among junior high school learners in Indonesia. This gap is particularly relevant for schools like SMPN 29 Padang, where students' disengagement stems from both low motivation and limited exposure to appealing reading materials.

SMPN 29 Padang presents a meaningful environment for this research due to its documented challenges in reading instruction. Preliminary observations indicate that students exhibit low motivation, limited comprehension, and minimal interest in reading English materials. Additionally, traditional teaching approaches and a lack of varied reading resources contribute to students' difficulties. Implementing English comic media may help bridge these gaps by providing visually rich, contextually supportive, and culturally relevant learning materials that align with student interests (Ana & Adi, 2015; Oliveira, 2018; Khairunnisak et al., 2024; Yani et al., 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study investigates the effect of English comic media on students' reading motivation and reading ability at SMPN 29 Padang. By examining both constructs simultaneously, the study aims to address an important gap in EFL research and contribute evidence-based recommendations for improving reading instruction in junior high schools. The findings are expected to provide practical insights into innovative pedagogical strategies that can be adapted in similar educational contexts.

The objective of this research is therefore to determine whether English comic media significantly influence the reading motivation and reading ability of eighth-grade students at SMPN 29 Padang, providing a foundation for more engaging and effective English language learning practices.

METHOD

This study employed a true experimental design using the post-test-only control group design. This design is appropriate for examining causal effects and is commonly used in educational research where random assignment is required (Creswell, 2012; Gay et al., 2012). Two intact classes were randomly assigned: one as the experimental group taught using English comic media, and the other as the control group taught using conventional text-based materials. The independent variable was the use of English comic media, while the dependent variables were students' reading motivation and reading ability.

The population consisted of all eighth-grade students at SMPN 29 Padang in the 2024/2025 academic year. Cluster random sampling was used because students were grouped into intact classes, making individual randomization impractical (Arikunto, 2012). Two classes were selected, with a total of 63 students. Class VIII.1 was assigned as the experimental group (n = 31), and Class VIII.5 served as the control group (n = 32).

Students' reading motivation was measured using a 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) motivational constructs and supported by recent multidimensional motivation frameworks (Watkins & Coffey, 2004). The questionnaire consisted of eight dimensions: Grades-compliance, Involvement, Social Competition, Reading Work Avoidanc, Curiosity, Recognition, and Efficacy.

The reading questionnaires was constructed on the Likert Scale. Respondents can choose from options such as strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) for each statement. Examples of questionnaire items include: "I enjoy reading English texts that include pictures or comics.", "I feel confident when reading English passages on my own.", "I like reading English when the materials are interesting".

The questionnaire was validated by two expert lecturers. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.89, indicating very high reliability.

Students' reading ability was measured through a 30-item multiple-choice test covering indicators such as identifying main ideas, locating explicit information, making inferences, identifying vocabulary meaning in context, and understanding text organization. Example items include: "What is the main idea of paragraph 2?", "What does the word 'admire' in line 3 most nearly mean?".

The test items were validated by English teachers and lecturers. Item reliability using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.81, indicating very high reliability.

Data analysis in this study was conducted to examine differences in students' reading motivation and reading ability between the experimental and control groups after the treatment. The analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20 and involved descriptive statistics, prerequisite testing, and hypothesis testing. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the data by calculating the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, as well as minimum and maximum scores to describe students' overall performance and motivational levels in both groups.

Before hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests were conducted to ensure that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. Normality testing was carried out using the Shapiro–Wilk test because the sample size in each group was fewer than 50. The results indicated that both reading motivation scores and reading ability scores were normally distributed, as the significance values were greater than 0.05. Homogeneity of variance was then examined using Levene's Test, which showed that the variances of the two groups were homogeneous, allowing further analysis using parametric tests.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Independent Samples t-test to determine whether there were significant differences between the experimental and control groups. Two hypotheses were tested: (1) the effect of English comic media on students' reading motivation and (2) the effect of English comic media on students' reading ability. The level of significance was set at 0.05. If the Sig. (2-tailed) value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant effect of English comic media. In addition, Cohen's d was calculated to measure the magnitude of the treatment effect. Through these analyses, the effectiveness of English comic media in enhancing students' reading motivation and reading ability was determined.

The study was conducted through four main stages: preparation, treatment implementation, data collection, and data analysis. During the preparation stage, a literature review was conducted to establish the theoretical framework, followed by hypothesis formulation and the selection of an experimental research design. A reading post-test and a reading motivation questionnaire were developed and validated by experts. Based on the placement test results, two classes were selected as the sample: Class VIII.1 as the experimental group and Class VIII.5 as the control group. Permission and coordination with the school and English teachers were obtained prior to implementation.

The treatment was carried out over several instructional sessions. The experimental group was taught using English comic media, while the control group received conventional reading instruction using printed narrative texts. Both groups were given the same learning objectives,

instructional time, and assessment formats, with instructional media as the only variable.

After the treatment, data were collected by administering a reading post-test and a reading motivation questionnaire to both groups under standardized conditions. The teaching procedures followed a genre-based approach consisting of Building Knowledge of the Field, Modelling of the Text, Joint Construction of the Text, and Independent Construction of the Text. Comic media were integrated during the modelling and joint construction stages in the experimental class, while the control class used conventional texts. Data were then analyzed statistically to determine the effects of the treatment on students' reading ability and motivation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Normality testing of pre-reading motivation

A normality test was conducted to examine students' initial reading motivation in both the experimental and control groups. Using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests, the results showed significance values greater than 0.05 for both groups, indicating normal data distribution. These findings confirm that the two groups had comparable baseline motivation levels, allowing valid comparison of post-treatment results.

Table 1. *Normality testing of students' pre - reading motivation in experimental and control class*

Tests of Normality							
	Class	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-Test Reading Motivation	Experiment	.138	32	.124	.961	32	.284
	Control	.122	31	.200*	.944	31	.107

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Normality testing of post-reading motivation

After the implementation of English comic media, a post-test was administered to measure students' reading motivation. Normality testing using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests showed significance values greater than 0.05 for both groups, indicating normally distributed data. These results allowed further parametric analysis and supported the evaluation of the effectiveness of English comic media in enhancing students' reading motivation.

Table 2 *Summary of normality testing of students' post-test reading ability in experimental class and control class*

Tests of Normality							
	Class	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Post-Test Reading Ability	Experimental Class	.138	31	.142	.944	31	.107
	Control Class	.143	32	.094	.967	32	.411

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The normality test results presented in Table 3.2 indicate that students' post-test reading scores in both the experimental and control groups were normally distributed. In the experimental group, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests yielded significance values of 0.142 and 0.107, respectively. Similarly, the control group showed significance values of 0.094 (Kolmogorov–Smirnov) and 0.411 (Shapiro–Wilk). As all values exceeded 0.05, the assumption of normality was met, allowing the use of parametric statistical analyses.

Hypothesis testing

Independent Samples t-tests were conducted to examine the effects of English comic media on students' reading motivation and reading ability. This analysis was appropriate as the data met the assumptions of normality and homogeneity.

Effect of English comic media on reading motivation

The first hypothesis tested whether there was a significant difference in reading motivation between the experimental and control groups. Descriptive statistics (Table 3.3) show that the experimental group (N = 31) obtained a higher mean score (M = 96.45, SD = 7.38) than the control group (N = 32; M = 80.91, SD = 5.54), with a mean difference of 15.54.

Table 3. *Group Statistics of Reading Motivation*

Group Statistics					
	Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-Test Reading Motivation	Experiment	31	96.45	7.375	1.325
	Control	32	80.91	5.544	.980

The Independent Samples t-test results (Table 4) revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t = 9.48$, $p < 0.001$). Since the significance value was lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that English comic media had a significant positive effect on students' reading motivation.

Table 4. *Result of the first hypothesis*

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Post-Test Reading Motivation	Equal variances assumed	3.858	.054	9.477	61	.000	15.5445	1.640	12.265	18.825
	Equal variances not assumed			9.435	55.686	.000	15.5445	1.648	12.244	18.847

Effect of English comic media on reading ability

The second hypothesis examined the effect of English comic media on students' reading ability.

As presented in Table 3.5, the experimental group ($N = 31$) achieved a higher mean score ($M = 90.35$, $SD = 5.74$) than the control group ($N = 32$; $M = 75.34$, $SD = 8.13$), resulting in a mean difference of 15.01.

Table 5. *Group statistics of reading ability*

Group Statistics					
	Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-Test Reading Ability	Experimental Class	31	90.35	5.742	1.031
	Control Class	32	75.34	8.134	1.438

Further analysis using the Independent Samples t-test (Table 6) showed a statistically significant difference between the groups ($t = 8.44$, $p < 0.001$). As the significance value was below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. These findings confirm that the use of English comic media significantly improved students' reading ability.

Table . *Result of the second hypothesis*

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Post-Test Reading Ability	Equal variances assumed	3.432	.069	8.437	61	.000	15.011	1.779	11.453	18.569

Equal variances not assumed	8.483	55.829	.000	15.011	1.770	11.466	18.556

Overall, the statistical analyses demonstrate that English comic media had a significant positive effect on both students' reading motivation and reading ability. Students in the experimental group consistently outperformed those in the control group across both variables.

This study confirms that the integration of English comic media significantly improved students' reading motivation and reading ability at SMPN 29 Padang. These findings support both theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence suggesting that multimodal and student-centered learning materials are particularly effective in EFL reading instruction.

English comic media and reading motivation

The significant improvement in students' reading motivation can be explained through motivational theories, particularly Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of intrinsic motivation. English comic media provided students with engaging storylines, relatable characters, and visually supported texts, allowing learners to feel more confident and autonomous in their reading process. This sense of competence and enjoyment likely contributed to the higher motivation scores observed in the experimental group.

These findings are consistent with Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) engaged reading model, which highlights the role of emotional and cognitive engagement in fostering reading motivation. Comics transform reading from a demanding task into an enjoyable experience, encouraging students to participate actively. Previous studies similarly report that comic-based instruction increases students' interest and willingness to read (Lam et al., 2017; Astuti et al., 2022; Septiana, 2022). The results also align with Wang et al. (2022), who found that motivational engagement strongly influences students' reading frequency and persistence.

Moreover, the multimodal nature of comics supports learners with diverse preferences. Flynn (2018) and Moses and Reid (2021) argue that multimodal texts promote positive reader identity and sustained engagement, particularly among reluctant readers. This may explain why students exposed to English comic media demonstrated significantly higher motivation than those taught using conventional texts.

English comic media and reading ability

The findings also indicate that English comic media significantly enhanced students' reading ability. This improvement can be interpreted through Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1990), which posits that learning is more effective when verbal and visual information are processed simultaneously. Comics present textual information alongside images, enabling students to infer meaning, recognize narrative structure, and understand vocabulary more easily.

In addition, Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) suggests that visual scaffolding reduces cognitive overload. Comics segment information into panels and provide contextual clues that support comprehension, which is particularly beneficial for EFL learners. This supports Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which states that students learn more effectively from integrated visual and verbal inputs. Similar conclusions were reported by Liu (2016), Yum et al. (2021), and Naura and Daulay (2024), who found that visual narratives improve comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

From a second language acquisition perspective, the findings align with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input. Comics often present authentic and contextualized language in manageable segments, allowing learners to access meaning without excessive linguistic burden. This structure also resonates with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, where visual and narrative scaffolding supports learners in progressing toward higher levels of comprehension.

The lower variability in reading scores within the experimental group further suggests that English comic media may promote more equitable learning outcomes. This finding supports Hidayat et al. (2024) and Rasmet et al. (2025), who argue that comic-based learning facilitates differentiated instruction by accommodating varying reading abilities and learning styles.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of English comic media significantly improves both students' reading ability and reading motivation at

the junior high school level. Students taught using English comics demonstrated better comprehension of narrative texts, particularly in understanding main ideas, supporting details, and contextual vocabulary, compared to those taught with conventional materials. The visual and narrative features of comics created a more engaging and less intimidating reading experience, which increased students' confidence, interest, and willingness to engage with English texts. These findings indicate that English comic media effectively support cognitive and affective aspects of EFL reading instruction.

The results imply that English comic media can serve as an effective and inclusive instructional resource in EFL classrooms. The positive impact observed across students regardless of gender suggests that comics accommodate diverse learning preferences and promote equitable participation. The integration of visual and verbal elements aligns with multimodal learning principles and supports current educational demands for engaging and student-centered instruction. Therefore, English teachers and curriculum developers are encouraged to incorporate comic-based materials as a complement to traditional texts in order to enhance reading engagement and comprehension.

Despite the promising results, this study has limitations related to the short intervention period and the absence of a pre-test for reading motivation. Future research is recommended to apply longitudinal designs, involve broader educational contexts, and examine different comic formats, including digital and student-generated comics. Further exploration of comic-based instruction across other language skills may also provide deeper insights. Overall, English comic media should be viewed not as a novelty, but as a pedagogically valuable tool that can enrich EFL reading instruction when implemented thoughtfully and systematically.

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It is hoped that this research will contribute to the advancement of English language teaching, particularly in the area of reading instruction using innovative media.

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