

Improving Junior High School Students' Reading Literacy through Comic-Based Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

This Despite the growing use of digital comics in English language learning, limited research has examined the effectiveness of researcher-developed dialogue-based digital comics for improving reading literacy among junior high school students in under-resourced schools with limited internet access. Therefore, this study investigated the effectiveness of dialogue-based digital comics in enhancing students' reading literacy in a remote educational setting. The study employed a quantitative pre-experimental approach using a one-group pretest-posttest design. Fifteen eighth-grade students from a public junior high school in South Konawe Regency, Indonesia, participated in the study. Reading literacy data were collected through a 15-item multiple-choice test administered before and after six instructional sessions using dialogue-based digital comics. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, and a paired-samples *t*-test. The findings revealed that the mean score increased from 52.33 in the pretest to 65.33 in the posttest, with an average gain score of 13.00 points. The paired-samples *t*-test indicated a statistically significant improvement in students' reading literacy ($p = 0.005$). These findings demonstrate that dialogue-based digital comics effectively support reading literacy development by providing contextualized visual and textual learning experiences and offer a practical instructional alternative for English language teaching in schools with limited technological resources.

Keywords: *Dialogue-Based Digital Comics, Junior High School Students, Reading Literacy, Remote Education, Reading Comprehension*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is a fundamental skill that every individual must possess, especially at the junior high school level (Crawford et al., 2025; Maghfiroh & Wachidah, 2023; A. Wulandari et al., 2022). Reading literacy extends beyond understanding texts, encompassing the ability to interpret, evaluate, and utilize information from reading material to solve everyday problems. This skill is crucial in English language learning because most materials and information are presented in text form (Can, 2020; Damaianti et al., 2020; Murphy & Arciuli, 2024).

However, rapid technological developments have brought new challenges. Students' interest in reading has declined significantly, replaced by the habit of spending time using gadgets and playing digital games (Supriyono, 2023). As a result, many students find it difficult to comprehend reading, especially English texts, which are considered long, monotonous, and boring (Kruk, 2021; Selvathurai & Ismail, 2024). Data from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) cited by Wulandari et al. (2022) even shows that Indonesians' interest in reading is only 0.001%, meaning only 1 in 1,000 people enjoy reading, illustrating the seriousness of the literacy problem in Indonesia.

Recent studies have increasingly highlighted the potential of digital and multimodal learning resources to enhance reading literacy in English language teaching. Reading literacy is no longer viewed merely as the ability to decode written texts but as the capacity to interpret, evaluate, and construct meaning from diverse forms of information in authentic contexts

(OECD, 2023). Within ELT, digital comics have attracted growing attention because they combine visual, textual, and contextual elements that facilitate vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, learner engagement, and motivation. Recent empirical studies have reported that digital comics improve students' reading comprehension and literacy by presenting meaningful narratives through multimodal representations that reduce cognitive demands while increasing learners' interest (Sakriani et al., 2022; Wulandari et al., 2023). Likewise, research on multimodal learning has demonstrated that integrating images, text, and interactive digital features promotes deeper comprehension and more effective language learning than text-only instruction (Lim, 2024; Mayer, 2021). Despite these advances, relatively few studies have investigated the effectiveness of researcher-developed dialogue-based digital comics for improving reading literacy among junior high school students in under-resourced schools with limited internet access. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the effectiveness of dialogue-based digital comics as an accessible instructional medium for enhancing students' reading literacy in English language learning.

This situation is further complicated at a public junior high school in South Konawe Regency, where this research took place. The school is located in an isolated area with limited land access. Although digital devices such as touchscreen TVs and Chromebooks are available, limited internet connectivity makes online learning less than optimal. Despite this, students are highly enthusiastic about learning. This situation demands engaging learning media that don't rely on an internet connection and can be used outside of formal class hours.

One factor contributing to low reading interest is the lack of learning media suited to student characteristics (Da'te et al., 2024). Rigid and monotonous conventional media often fail to encourage students to read actively (Wigfield et al., 2014). In this context, comics are a potential alternative media because they combine text and visuals, making them more engaging and easier to understand (Brugar et al., 2018; Consorti et al., 2023). Dialogue-based comics, in particular, can help students understand the context of conversations naturally, improve vocabulary mastery, and facilitate understanding of sentence structure (Kohnke, 2018; Liu, 2004; Min & Abdul Aziz, 2025). Visual elements such as characters, colors, and panels can bring text to life, making it more contextual and enjoyable to read (Fitria et al., 2023).

One innovation that can address the challenge of low reading interest in the digital era is the use of digital comics (Linardatos & Apostolou, 2023). Digital comics integrate visual elements and interactive technology, thereby capturing students' attention and providing a more dynamic reading experience (Haq et al., 2025). Choosing digital comics as a learning medium for students is the right step, because comics not only provide flexible material but are also equipped with images that can visualize abstract concepts more concretely (Pulungan, 2023). In this study, researchers developed dialogue-based comics adapted to the applicable school curriculum. These comics present engaging and easy-to-understand learning materials, with the aim of increasing student active engagement and strengthening their understanding of discourse structure and communication context within texts.

Several previous studies have explored the use of comics and digital comics in educational settings, particularly in language learning and literacy development. Comics have been recognized as effective learning media because they combine visual and textual elements that help students understand information more easily and maintain learning engagement. Fitria et al. (2023) found that digital comic teaching materials contributed positively to students' literacy development by presenting learning content in a more attractive and contextualized form. Similarly, Maghfiroh & Wachidah (2023) reported that digital comic-based learning media significantly improved elementary students' reading literacy skills. Research conducted by Linardatos & Apostolou (2023) also revealed that students showed positive perceptions toward the use of digital comics because the media increased participation and classroom engagement. In addition, Haq et al. (2025) demonstrated that contextual digital comic-based approaches could support English literacy development by connecting learning materials with students' real-life experiences.

Previous research has also demonstrated the effectiveness of comics as a language learning medium. [Lopez \(2022\)](#) found that comics designed for learning contexts could significantly improve students' reading skills and vocabulary. Similarly, [Moncayo Herrera et al. \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that digital comics could create interactive learning experiences and increase student motivation. However, research specifically developing dialogue-based digital comics that are directly adapted to the junior high school curriculum, implemented outside formal school hours, and applied in areas with limited internet access remains limited. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating the effectiveness of dialogue-based digital comics in improving junior high school students' reading literacy in a remote educational setting.

Based on these conditions, this study was conducted with the aim of determining the effectiveness of dialogue-based comics in increasing reading interest and analyzing their influence on the reading literacy skills of junior high school students in areas with limited internet access. This research is expected to make a real contribution to the development of innovative, engaging, and adaptive English learning media to geographic conditions and student needs in the digital age. To achieve this, the research is guided by the following questions: (1) Are dialogue-based comics effective in increasing junior high school students' interest in reading? (2) How does students' reading literacy improve after the implementation of dialogue-based digital comics?

METHOD

Pretest-Posttest Design. This design involved one group of students being given a pre-test to measure their reading literacy skills before the treatment, followed by instruction using dialogue-based digital comics, and concluded with a post-test to assess their improvement after the treatment. The design was selected because it allows researchers to measure changes in students' learning outcomes before and after the implementation of a particular treatment within the same group. According to pre-experimental research principles, the One Group Pretest-Posttest Design is appropriate for identifying the potential effectiveness of an educational intervention when the use of a control group is not feasible in a natural classroom setting.

The use of this design was also relevant to the purpose of this study, which focused on examining the effectiveness of dialogue-based digital comics in improving students' reading literacy. Reading literacy development can be observed through measurable changes in students' comprehension performance after repeated exposure to contextualized reading materials. The dialogue-based digital comics used in this study integrated visual illustrations and narrative dialogues, which are considered capable of supporting students' comprehension, maintaining reading engagement, and helping learners connect textual information with contextual meaning. This aligns with Schema Theory proposed by [Anderson & Pearson \(2002\)](#), which emphasizes that students comprehend texts more effectively when new information can be connected to their prior knowledge and experiences.

In addition, the design was considered suitable for the context of this study because the research was conducted in a remote educational environment with limited internet access and limited classroom flexibility. Therefore, the One Group Pretest-Posttest Design provided a practical and efficient way to evaluate the impact of dialogue-based digital comics on students' reading literacy within the available learning conditions.

Participants

The participants of this study were 15 eighth-grade students from a public junior high school in South Konawe Regency, Indonesia, consisting of 14 female students and 1 male student. The total student population of the school was 79 students, while the eighth-grade population consisted of 33 students distributed across one class.

The participants were selected through simple random sampling. First, all eighth-grade students were identified as the target population because they had been exposed to

English instruction based on the curriculum implemented at the school and were studying reading materials relevant to the objectives of this research. Each student was assigned a number, and 15 students were randomly selected to participate in the study. This procedure provided all eligible students with an equal opportunity to be included in the sample and helped minimize selection bias.

Eighth-grade students were chosen because reading literacy is one of the key learning outcomes emphasized at this level of education. Furthermore, students at this grade level regularly engage with narrative and descriptive texts that require comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and interpretation skills, which were the focus of the present study. The selected participants completed all stages of the research, including the pretest, six treatment sessions using dialogue-based digital comics, and the posttest.

Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a reading literacy test administered as both a pretest and a posttest. The test consisted of 15 multiple-choice questions designed to measure students' reading literacy performance. The items assessed three reading literacy indicators: text comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and the ability to draw conclusions from a text. The test items were developed based on the reading competencies specified in the eighth-grade English curriculum and were aligned with the learning objectives addressed during the treatment sessions.

The test was administered in printed worksheet form due to limited internet connectivity at the research site. Using the same set of indicators in both the pretest and posttest enabled the researcher to compare students' reading literacy performance before and after the intervention. The treatment instrument consisted of dialogue-based digital comics developed to support reading literacy instruction. The comics presented narrative texts through visual illustrations and dialogues that encouraged students to identify information, interpret meaning, recognize vocabulary, and infer messages from the texts.

The dialogue-based digital comics used in this study were developed by the researcher using several digital tools. StoryTribe was used to create and edit comic characters and visual scenes, ChatGPT was used as an assistive tool to generate initial dialogue drafts, which were subsequently reviewed, edited, and validated by the researcher to ensure their linguistic accuracy, curriculum alignment, and instructional suitability. PixelLab was utilized to create speech bubbles, while Adobe Illustrator was used to edit and arrange the final comic layouts. At the time of manuscript preparation, two additional comic topics were still under development. Therefore, the comic samples included in this study represent a near-final version and may undergo minor revisions to improve their visual presentation and instructional quality.

The treatment was implemented across six meetings conducted outside formal school hours. During the intervention, students engaged in guided reading activities using the digital comics, completed comprehension tasks, discussed story content, identified unfamiliar vocabulary, and practiced drawing conclusions from the texts. These activities were designed to provide repeated exposure to reading materials while maintaining students' engagement through visual and contextual support.

Because some vocabulary items contained in the comics exceeded the students' proficiency levels, the researcher provided scaffolding through explanations and guided discussion to facilitate comprehension and participation during the learning activities.

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For example:

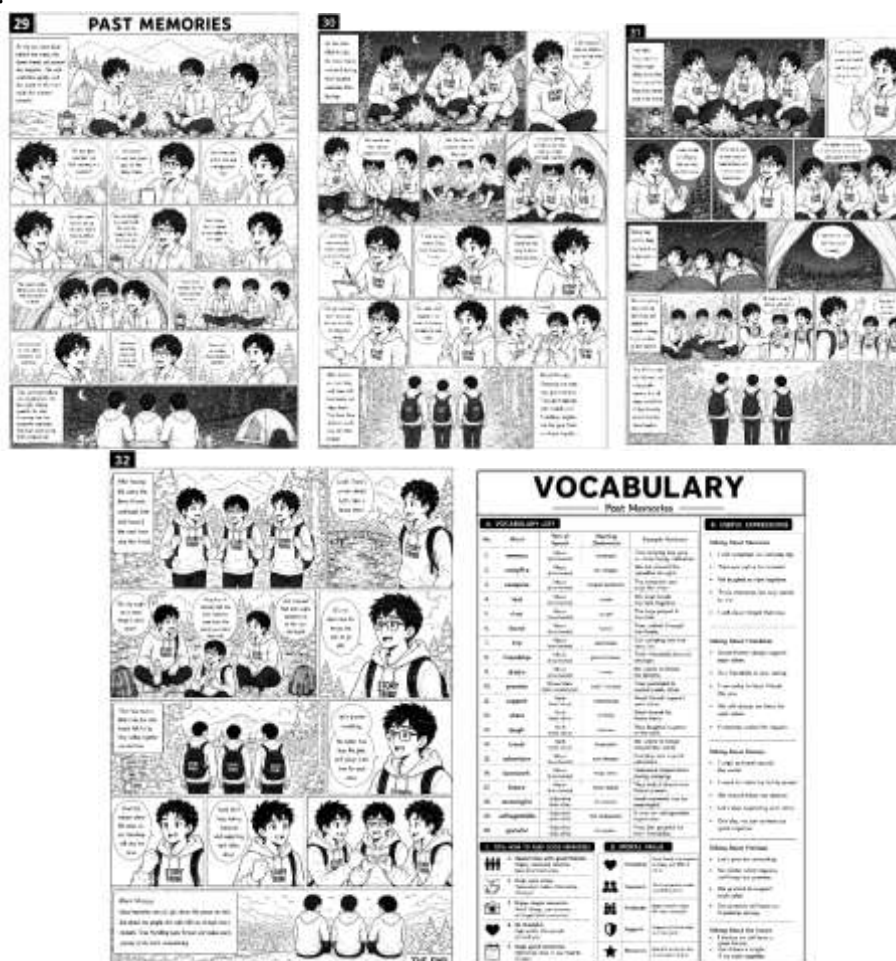


Figure 1. Sample of the Dialogue-Based Digital Comic Used During the Treatment

Figure 1 illustrates one page of the dialogue-based digital comic used during the intervention. The comic combines visual illustrations and contextualized dialogues to facilitate reading comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and contextual understanding. The complete set of comics consisted of several topics aligned with the eighth-grade English curriculum.

Procedures

The research consisted of three stages. The preparation stage included developing a Lesson Implementation Plan (RPP), creating dialogue-based digital comic media, and developing test instruments. The implementation stage began with a pre-test to measure students' initial reading literacy skills. Subsequently, learning using dialogue-based digital comic media was conducted over six sessions outside formal school hours. In the final session, students were given a post-test to measure changes in their abilities after the treatment. The final stage involved processing the data obtained from the test results.

The data obtained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 16.0. The analysis consisted of descriptive statistics, a normality test, and a paired-samples t-test. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first research question regarding students' reading literacy achievement before and after the implementation of dialogue-based digital comics. The analysis included the mean, median, minimum score, maximum score, and standard deviation of the pretest and posttest scores.

Before conducting the hypothesis test, the normality of the gain scores was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test. This procedure was conducted to determine whether the data met the normality assumption required for parametric testing. A significance value greater than 0.05 indicated that the data were normally distributed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

To answer the second research question, a paired-samples t-test was performed to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores. The level of significance was set at 0.05. If the significance value was lower than 0.05, the difference between the two sets of scores was considered statistically significant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Reading Literacy Achievement Before and After the Implementation of Dialogue-Based Digital Comics

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test

Statistics	Pretest	Posttest	Gain Score
N	15	15	15
Mean	52.33	65.33	13.00
Median	50.00	70.00	5.00
Minimum	25	30	-10
Maximum	80	80	45
Std. Dev	19.00	14.41	15.27

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' pretest and posttest scores. The results indicate an improvement in students' reading literacy after the implementation of dialogue-based digital comics. The mean score increased from 52.33 in the pretest to 65.33 in the posttest, resulting in an average gain score of 13 points. Similarly, the median score increased from 50.00 to 70.00, suggesting that the improvement occurred not only among a few high-achieving students but also across the majority of participants.

The descriptive statistics further show changes in score distribution after the treatment. Before the intervention, students' scores ranged from 25 to 80, indicating considerable variation in reading literacy performance. After six sessions using dialogue-based digital comics, the score range shifted to 30–80. Although several students still experienced learning difficulties, the increase in both mean and median scores suggests that students generally demonstrated better reading comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and ability to draw conclusions from texts.

The improvement observed in this study may be attributed to the characteristics of dialogue-based digital comics. The integration of visual illustrations and written dialogues provided contextual support that helped students interpret textual information more effectively. Visual elements assisted students in understanding story events, character actions, and contextual meanings, while dialogues provided authentic language input that encouraged students to engage actively with the reading materials. As a result, students were able to process information from the texts more easily than when relying solely on conventional reading materials.

These findings support previous studies highlighting the educational benefits of digital comics for literacy development. [Fitria et al. \(2023\)](#) found that digital comic-based learning materials facilitated literacy development by presenting information in a more engaging and meaningful manner. Similarly, [Maghfiroh & Wachidah \(2023\)](#) reported that digital comics significantly improved students' reading literacy by combining visual and textual information. [Linardatos & Apostolou \(2023\)](#) also found that students responded positively to digital comics because the medium increased learning engagement and participation. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that dialogue-based digital comics can also support reading literacy development in geographically isolated schools with limited internet access.

Effectiveness of Dialogue-Based Digital Comics in Improving Reading Literacy

Table 2. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Result

Variable	W Statistic	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Gain Score	0.957	0.637	Normal

Prior to hypothesis testing, a Shapiro–Wilk normality test was conducted to determine whether the gain scores met the assumption of normal distribution. As shown in Table 2, the significance value was 0.637, which exceeded the threshold of 0.05. This result indicates that the gain scores were normally distributed and that a parametric statistical test could be appropriately applied.

Table 3. Paired sample t-test result

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	Sig. (p)
Pretest – Posttest	-13.00	15.27	-3.298	14	0.005

Following the normality analysis, a paired-samples t-test was performed to examine whether the difference between students' pretest and posttest scores was statistically significant. As presented in Table 3, the significance value obtained was 0.005, which was lower than the predetermined significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that the implementation of dialogue-based digital comics resulted in a statistically significant improvement in students' reading literacy.

The significant improvement observed in this study may be explained by the ability of dialogue-based digital comics to provide multimodal learning support. Through the combination of visual representations, contextualized dialogues, and narrative structures, students were exposed to multiple sources of meaning while reading. This condition likely reduced the cognitive burden associated with processing English texts and enabled students to focus more effectively on comprehension. Furthermore, repeated exposure to vocabulary and sentence structures throughout the six treatment sessions may have strengthened students' ability to interpret textual information and construct meaning from the reading passages.

The findings are consistent with previous research investigating the role of comics and digital comics in literacy instruction. [Lopez \(2022\)](#) reported that comics-based learning materials improved students' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. [Moncayo Herrera et al. \(2025\)](#) found that digital comics promoted active learning engagement and enhanced students' interaction with learning content. Likewise, [Min & Abdul Aziz \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that graphic novel-based instruction significantly improved learners' reading skills by providing meaningful contextual support. Similar findings were also reported by [Haq et al. \(2025\)](#), who found that contextual digital comic-based learning promoted English literacy development by connecting reading materials with students' everyday experiences.

The present study contributes additional evidence to the growing body of literature on digital comic-based learning by focusing on students in a remote educational context. Unlike many previous studies conducted in technology-rich environments, this study demonstrates that digital comics can remain effective even in schools facing limited internet connectivity. The findings suggest that educational innovation does not necessarily depend on continuous internet access; rather, appropriately designed learning materials that combine visual and textual information can provide meaningful support for literacy development. Consequently, dialogue-based digital comics may serve as a practical alternative for English teachers seeking to improve students' reading literacy in under-resourced educational settings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrated that the implementation of dialogue-based digital comics effectively improved the reading literacy of eighth-grade students at a public junior high school in South Konawe Regency. Students showed higher reading literacy achievement after participating in six instructional sessions, indicating improvements in text comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and the ability to draw conclusions from written texts. The findings suggest that integrating visual illustrations with contextualized dialogues creates meaningful learning experiences that enhance students' engagement and support reading comprehension. Moreover, the successful implementation of the media in a remote school with limited internet access highlights its practicality as an accessible instructional resource for English language

teaching in under-resourced settings. Overall, dialogue-based digital comics represent an effective and engaging alternative for supporting reading literacy development and offer valuable pedagogical implications for English teachers seeking to promote more interactive and contextually meaningful reading instruction.

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