

DIGITAL COMICS (WEBTOON) FOR EFL READING COMPREHENSION: LEARNER PREFERENCES AND PERCEPTUAL FACTORS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received : Sep 07, 2025

Revised : Oct 26, 2025

Accepted : Nov 25, 2025

Available online : Nov 30, 2025

Keywords:

Digital Comics, EFL Reading
Comprehension, Learner Preferences,
Perceptual Factors

ABSTRAK

This research investigates the preferences and perceptions of English learners toward the use of digital comics as a medium for enhancing reading comprehension. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, the data were collected from 100 participants mixed between 50 high school students and 50 university students with prior experience in digital comic usage. A four-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect the data, then the data that was collected explained by a descriptive quantitative method. The data were analyzed using a descriptive quantitative to provide a clear overview of participants' perceptions based on the Likert-scale. The findings revealed that the majority of the students preferably use webtoon instead of other digital comics for learning. The

findings can be reported that digital comics significantly improve reading comprehension, facilitate vocabulary acquisition, and engage more compared to traditional reading materials. More than half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements across all of the statements, indicating consistently positive perceptions. Engagement and motivation were strongly influenced by the visual and interactive features of digital comics, while language proficiency and prior experience emerged as key factors shaping perceptions. The results highlight the potential of digital comics as an innovative learning media that makes reading more interesting. These findings highlight the pedagogical value of digital comics especially webtoon in language education to improve both comprehension and learner motivation.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is the ability to break down, decode, combine what you already know, understand, and clearly understand the words, sentences, or compositions, especially the content and its contexts (Abbas K, 2021). In learning English, reading comprehension is as important as any other skills. It is aligned with the statement from Suhaila et al. (2025) The ability to understand texts is considered a crucial skill of great importance in education, significantly influencing students' academic success. Almuslimi

F (2020) also stated that reading is a crucial component in educational settings of a foreign language learning. Aside from how important reading comprehension is, students' reading comprehension on EFL remains low. Students' lack of motivation, low prior knowledge, and poor English vocabulary are three important reasons why they have trouble understanding what they read (Nanda & Azmy, 2020). Students are still facing a lot of limitations and challenges.

One of the limitations is that, reading activities at school are only done during teaching and learning sessions. Library reading activities are rarely conducted, and when they occur, they are usually part of learning activities carried out in the library (Sari et al, 2020). Beside that, students also face some challenges, and one of them is that they tend to have a limited knowledge or vocabulary regarding reading comprehension. In other research conducted by Septia et al. (2022) There are four things that make it hard for students to understand what they read: their interest in learning to read, their trouble reading text, and their trouble translating English meaning, lack of facility in their school, and house environment. Research conducted by Ramadhianti and Somba (2023) The students had trouble reading because they couldn't tell the difference between main ideas and supporting details, get the main idea, find the topic of texts from other cultures, connect the topic to what they already knew, understand vocabulary, and make inferences about the text.

That research aligns with research conducted by Rais et al. (2021) difficulty that most students face is determining the main idea of a text. According to Smith et al. (2021) Vocabulary and the presence of rich schemata gives readers a greater opportunity to build a strong understanding of the texts they read. When learning reading, we need to use a developed media to pique the interest of the students and engage them into the material. In this era, where the use of technology is rapidly increasing, many learning media have been developed to cope with it. According to Zhou and Wei (2018), technology has evolved significantly since its early use in the 1980s, moving from a tutorial function to serving as an ecological tool that is integral to language learning and teaching. Integrating innovative technologies such as computers, YouTube, and platforms like WhatsApp and email can make today's learning more meaningful and engaging, moving beyond monotonous methods (Bimayu & Nopriadi, 2019). Other studies have also shown that students can learn more quickly and keep track of their progress with the help of technology and advanced tools (Haleem et al, 2022). Owing to that, the use of traditional media in teaching and learning such as printed media (books, newspapers, magazines)

has become diminished. According to Harpain et al. (2022), in this era, only relying on traditional textbooks is not the most optimal approach for students'. With the development in technology, various advanced media has been used in learning and teaching English in school, mainly to ensure that the students' can understand and engage in learning.

Digital comics are one of the more advanced types of media that can be used to teach and learn English, especially to help students understand what they read better. Digital comics are thought to be more interesting and useful than just text (Mawarsih et al., 2024). Portable access via smartphones and tablets also allows students to read anytime and anywhere, supporting more frequent reading practice that improves comprehension skills over time (Ahsanah & Utomo, 2020). Ahsanah and Utomo (2020) state that digital comics can serve as an effective educational medium, particularly in the context of improving students' English language competence.

The integration of digital comics in the learning process not only enhances language skills but also helps student engagement and interest in the subject given. Digital comics have advantages in accessibility, adjustable text size, lighting conditions for screen reading, and speech to text options for visually impaired readers, which print media lacks (Oh et al., 2021). According to Vita Losi et al. (2023) comic strips serve as beneficial tools for teaching foreign languages, allowing students to improve their language skills and express themselves visually while also enhancing their reading and writing abilities, as well as their proficiency in linguistic elements such as syntax and vocabulary. Harahap & Suryaman (2022) It was also said that students who read English comics online not only learned vocabulary and grammar, but also did better in school overall. Other studies have also shown that using digital comic media can greatly improve students' English communication skills, especially when it comes to making guesses, making arguments, defining terms, and generalizing well. Moreover, digital comics boost imagination and creativity due to pictures contained in it, and when applied in a structured manner, they contribute in enhancing overall language proficiency (Ghofur, 2022).

That research aligns with the results from Anggeraini et al. (2020), she stated that the effect in comprehending text for readers is strategy because it is the guidelines for the readers in getting the ideas of the text. Research conducted by Schwabe et al. (2022) demonstrated outcomes indicating that the interactive features of digital texts enhance students' reading comprehension, irrespective of the specific type of additional feature. While digital comics are increasingly used in language learning, there is limited research

on which digital comics have the most influence on students and how it is impacting English learners' reading comprehension. Additionally, the influence of factors such as language proficiency and learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of digital comics remains underexplored. To address these gaps, this study investigates : (1) The most common digital comics used by English learners for reading comprehension improvement; (2) English learners perspective towards the effectiveness of digital comics, factors influencing English learners' perceptions, and to what extent do English learners find digital comics more engaging compared to traditional reading materials in improving their reading comprehension.

METHOD

This Study uses Descriptive research design to describe trend, pattern, and perceptions from the findings without manipulating any variables. The instrument that was used to collect data in this study is questionnaire. This research uses a 4 point likert scale to avoid passive responding and to make responses more decisive. The 4 point Likert scale questionnaires adapted from the instrument developed by As Sabiq and Rohmatulhaq (2024), which was originally designed to examine students' perceptions of Webtoon as a self-directed learning medium for reading skills. Several modifications were made to align the items with the specific objectives and context of the present research. Following these adjustments, the instrument was evaluated using SPSS for both validity and reliability. Pearson's product moment correlation was used to check the validity of the indicators by looking at how well they related to the total score of their construct. Cronbach's alpha was used to check the reliability of the items by looking at how consistent they were with each other.

There are 4 Indicators for this research, the first one is preference, Perception, Engagement, and influencing factors. Each indicator has different items, for the first one there is only one item to decide which digital comics most participants use. The second indicator contains 7 items, the third one contains 6 Items and the last one has 2 Items. other items also given to map out their understanding and experiences regarding digital comics.

The participants in this research were 100 English learners mixed between 50 high school students and 50 university students who have prior knowledge regarding the use of digital comics in learning. Upon completion of the data collection, the data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics

(frequency, percentage), test instrument validity and reliability, and present results in tables and percentages according to the research objectives. Instrument can be stated as a valid instrument if ($r > 0.30$) and the instrument can be claimed for its reliability using Cronbach Alpha.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

From the research that was conducted, students who frequently use digital comics are more likely to use webtoon instead of other digital comics such as manga or web novels. It is shown by the pie chart below where 47,4% students choose webtoon, 27,7% students choose manga, 18,2% students choose web novels, and the rest of it choose other kinds of digital comics.

Table 1. Perceptions of Digital Comics for Reading Comprehension

No	Questionnaire Items	S. Disagree	Disagree	Agree	S. Agree
1.	I feel that my reading comprehension have improved after reading Digital comics regularly	1%	12%	65%	22%
2.	Digital comics help me understand reading material better.	2%	8%	55%	35%
3.	I feel more engaged in reading when using digital comics as a media.	3%	10%	50%	37%
4.	Digital comics make it easier for me to retain information from the reading material.	1%	10%	58%	31%
5.	I feel that Digital comics can be used as supporting media to enhance my reading comprehension	2%	11%	56%	31%

In the first statement, the majority of the students agree that their reading comprehension improved after they regularly read digital comics. Among students, 65% agreeing and notably, 22% of students strongly agree with the statement. Additionally, it is important to note that digital comics can also help them understand the material better. It is shown from the second statement where 55% students agree and 35% students strongly agree to the statement.

The third statement shows that 50% students agree and 37% strongly agree that digital comics as a medium of learning can be more engaging. The majority of the students agree due to the fact that digital comics can be easily accessed and more entertaining than regular books. Since reading with digital comics as a medium engaging the students, they feel that it is easier for them to retain information from the reading

material. It is shown by the number of students who agree with the fourth statement. 58% agree with the fourth statement, and 31% strongly agree with it.

Based on the previous statement where the majority of the students agree that digital comics can be beneficial in reading comprehension, it is inevitable that in the fifth statement 56% students agreeing to the statement, even 31% strongly agree. In addition, the students all agree that reading digital comics can help them understand what they read better. proven by 61% of students agree to the sixth statement and 28% strongly agree. The number was very high due to the fact that from the previous statements more than half of the students agree with each statement. On the seventh statement, 55% students agree and 30% strongly agree because in digital comics, there are lots of new vocabulary to learn, which can be a word bank for English learners.

Table 2. Engagement and Motivation

No	Questionnaire Items	S. Disagree	Disagree	Agree	S. Agree
1.	I find reading using digital comics is more interesting compared to reading on traditional materials.	7%	20%	51%	22%
2.	I feel that my interest in reading English has increased after using Digital comics	3%	20%	53%	24%
3.	Digital comics hold my attention longer compared to traditional reading materials.	4%	15%	58%	23%
4.	I feel motivated to read digital comics rather than with traditional texts.	5%	18%	52%	25%
5.	The use of Digital comics make reading more enjoyable compared to print books.	5%	22%	48%	25%
6.	I feel like I can improve my reading comprehension when using digital comics than when reading traditional text-based materials.	2%	22%	56%	20%

The majority of the students on the eighth statement agreed that using digital comics is more interesting than reading on traditional materials. Among the students 51% agree and 22% strongly agree, it is stated that most of the learners are interested in using technology as a medium for learning. On the ninth statement 53% students agree and 24% students strongly agree that digital comics can make students more interested in reading.

Based on the participant's response on the tenth statement, digital comics can hold the students' attention longer than traditional reading materials with a percentage of 58% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing. Moreover, digital comics hold students' attention longer, they also motivate the students to read more. It is proven where on the eleventh statement, 52% students agree and 25% strongly agree.

On the twelfth statement 48% participants agree and 25% strongly agree that digital comics make reading more enjoyable compared to printed books. It is observed that digital comics can improve students' reading enjoyment. Students feel that their reading comprehension improves when they use digital comics rather than traditional text-based materials. According to the data collected, 56% agree and 20% strongly agree to that statement, indicating that digital comics might be a big help for students who want to improve their reading comprehension.

Table 3. Factors influencing perceptions

No	Questionnaire Items	S. Disagree	Disagree	Agree	S. Agree
1.	Does your current English proficiency level affect your enjoyment of reading digital comics?	2%	14%	59%	25%
2.	Do you feel that your prior experience with digital comics makes it easier for you to use it as a media for improving your reading comprehension?	1%	12%	56%	31%

The fourteenth statements show that the majority of the students agree and strongly agree that their current English proficiency level affects their enjoyment of reading digital comics (59% agreed and 25% strongly agreed). In the last statement the results remains the same as fourteenth statement where majority of the students agree and strongly agree towards the statement about prior experience with digital comics make students easier to use it as a media for learning (56% agreed and 31% strongly agreed).

Discussion

The results explain that the use of webtoon is more favorable compared to other media, but still other media such as manga, Japanese style comics still maintain a significant readership. Meanwhile, other students favored web novels, which shows that text based digital narratives also hold a certain level of popularity. The remaining percentage of students indicated their preference for other kinds of digital comics, highlighting a diversity of interests within the students.

There are various reasons why students choose webtoon over other digital comics such as visuals and other interactive elements. Webtoon also offers various genres such as romance, action, fantasy, comedy, horror, and slice of life. Students can choose any genre they want and are less likely to get bored, making Webtoon an effective medium for vocabulary enrichment (Feronika et al., 2025). In addition, learning through Webtoon is

considered simpler and more accessible, which further supports its potential to enhance students' reading literacy (Indah & Wibowo, 2021).

The students think that using digital comics to help them understand what they read has a lot of benefits. Digital comics can help students understand what they read better by getting them interested in the material, making it easier for them to remember new words, and making it easier for them to understand what they are given. Webtoon's mix of pictures and words helps students learn new words in a clearer way, which makes it easier for them to remember vocabulary (Aulia & Ulfa, 2025). Saputri et al. (2021) They also said that digital comics are one of the new types of media that can be used in reading classrooms to make the learning process better for students by increasing their motivation, quality, and success. In other research conducted by Harahap and Suryaman (2022), students strongly agreed that the comic strip approach is a useful tool in supporting text comprehension, as the integration of text and visual images helps learners gain deeper knowledge and makes reading easier. Based on the first table and other research that aligns, it is safely said that students feel digital comics can be beneficial for the improvement of their reading comprehension.

The findings on engagement and motivation part showed that digital comics significantly enhance both in the reading comprehension. One of the most important things that affects how well learners understand what they read is motivation, as it supports both performance and understanding of texts (Ahmadi, 2017). Digital materials are very useful for learning, especially when it comes to getting students to want to learn (Jannah et al., 2025). Research conducted by Rahayu and Wiyanah (2023) found that Webtoon comics effectively enhance students' reading interest by providing colorful images and engaging stories that make reading more enjoyable and easily accessible. The majority of students expressed that digital comics are far more interesting than traditional materials, with over half agreeing that such media can sustain attention and stimulate students' desire to read more. The visual and interactive elements of digital comics appear to engage learners more effectively, resulting in prolonged focus and increased students reading frequency. Additionally, the high percentage of agreement regarding reading enjoyment and comprehension improvement further strengthens the motivational impact of digital comics. These results are consistent with Tomaso et al. (2023), who found that using a Webtoon comic application led to improved reading comprehension with 75% of students reaching the minimum target score and that students described the experience as "fun, enjoyable, interesting," boosting their reading motivation. These results suggest that

integrating digital comics into language learning environments can be a powerful tool to foster student interest, encourage active participation, and improve overall reading outcomes. Since students' intrinsic motivation is higher than extrinsic motivation in learning English, the use of digital comics can help the learning process easier (Fachraini, 2017).

For the factors influencing perception it can be stated that students' perceptions are influenced by their English proficiency and their prior knowledge regarding digital comics. These results align with research conducted by Hamid et al. (2020) where he stated that background knowledge and linguistic knowledge including vocabulary and grammar are fundamental to EFL reading comprehension. Students acknowledged that their current proficiency in English had a direct influence on their enjoyment of reading digital comics, which is aligned with the finding from research that was conducted by Utomo & Ahsanah (2023) combining texts and images in digital comics provided students with contextual and meaningful learning. Furthermore, majority of the students also agree that previous familiarity with digital comics contributed positively to the usefulness of these materials in a learning context, aligning with the results from research conducted by Golding & Verrier (2020) both comprehension and inferential understanding improved following the comics literacy intervention. These findings show the importance of both linguistic capability and experiential familiarity as determinants in shaping students' attitudes and engagement toward digital comics in educational settings.

CONCLUSION

From this research, we can conclude that digital comics, particularly Webtoon, are highly favored by students as a medium for enhancing reading comprehension. As shown by the data, the majority of the students choose webtoon as their preference over other digital comics for reading comprehension, underlining that webtoon is more appealing among learners due to its visuals and other interactive elements. Beyond popularity, students perceived Webtoon as an effective medium for sustaining interest and supporting comprehension more effectively than traditional materials.

Notably, students' perceptions reflect the belief that digital comics enhance not only reading comprehension but also engagement and vocabulary acquisition. It is indicated by the average results of the questionnaire that maintain positive on each of the questions asked and the reliability itself is acceptable with the cornbach alpha 0.796. From the students perspective, the use of digital comics provide them with lots of benefits

regarding the improvement of their reading comprehension. It is shown by the results from the first table where more than 50% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that digital comics can improve their reading comprehension. Furthermore, on the second table, reliability shown is 0.807, it is a very good reliability that displays that the results are reliable. More than 50% of the students also agree and strongly agree towards all of the statements regarding the impact of digital comics on their engagements and motivation. They agree that the use of digital comics can engage and motivate them more, rather than using traditional media due to the fact that digital comics provide colorful images, engaging stories, and digital interactivity. The last table also presents similar findings where the majority of the students agree and strongly agree that their current English proficiency and also prior knowledge towards digital comics has a substantial role in utilizing digital comics as a medium for learning. Based on the positive impact of webtoon, teachers can use it as a motivational media to engage students and webtoon can also support teachers in teaching digital literacy, narrative comprehension, and multimodal text analysis. Before implementing the use of webtoon in the classroom, teachers are required to create worksheet or learning activities based on webtoon to enhance the potential of webtoon such as character analysis, identifying plot structure, or discussing moral values. In conclusion, digital comics offer considerable pedagogical potential. Their capacity to engage students, motivate reading, support comprehension, and align with learners' language and media experience positions them as a valuable instructional resource in contemporary language education.

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