

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of Study

Reading is a fundamental skill that students must master when studying English. However, many junior high school students still struggle with reading English literature. This can be attributed to limited vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and a lack of enthusiasm for reading. Students often receive texts without illustrations that could help them understand the material. Therefore, a more engaging and successful approach to improving students' reading abilities is necessary, such as using digital comics.

The researcher identified this problem during initial observations at SMPN 2 Gunung Talang, specifically during literacy class sessions. Although the purpose of the class was to encourage reading, several students appeared uninterested. Rather than engaging with the reading material, students were often seen talking to others or showing signs of boredom. This revealed that the students were not only indifferent to reading but also had difficulty understanding the materials provided. The texts used in these literacy lessons were largely traditional and lacked visual elements, which may have contributed to the students' disinterest. Based on these findings, the researcher concluded that the students' low motivation and reading difficulty were partly due to the unappealing nature of the reading materials used.

Digital comics are educational tools that blend text and visuals to help students learn more effectively. According to dual-coding theory (Paivio, 1971) people perceive information in two ways: through words and visuals. Since these two approaches complement each other, relevant visuals can help students better understand the content they are reading. Furthermore, cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1998) states that using relevant visuals helps students focus while reading by eliminating the need to translate each word individually. Thus, digital comics serve as a source of enjoyment and as a learning tool to help children better understand reading.

In this study, the digital comics used are classified as narrative texts, specifically fictitious material. Fictional narrative literature was chosen because it has compelling plots that can boost students' interest in reading. Furthermore, narrative texts are often included in junior high school English curricula. Thus, the use of digital comics based on narrative fiction is intended to help students understand the structure of texts and increase their enthusiasm for reading.

Digital comics can help enhance your reading abilities. According to one study, digital comics can increase children's interest in reading and understanding literature. Liu (2020) found that children who learned through digital comics enjoyed reading more than those who read only plain text. However, other studies, such as those by Smith and Jones

(2021), reveal that without proper guidance, students may focus on the pictures rather than the content of the text.

Previous studies have examined the benefits of digital comics in reading instruction, but most of them have focused on general reading comprehension. Garcia and Molina (2022) found that digital comics can increase reading engagement. However, little research has examined how students' reading skills change before and after using digital comics in the classroom, especially at the junior high school level. Thus, this study aims to determine how students' reading abilities change when narrative fiction text-based digital comics are adopted in English instruction at the junior high school level.

This study examines how students' reading abilities develop before and after using digital comics. It aims to shed light on the potential of digital comics as a learning tool. If digital comics are shown to significantly improve reading abilities, this could lead to more effective tools for improving students' reading comprehension.

## **B. Identification of Problem**

Based on the background of the study, several problems have been identified that justify the need for this research. First, many students at SMPN 2 Gunung Talang still face difficulties in understanding English reading texts. These difficulties are commonly related to limited vocabulary mastery, unfamiliar grammatical structures, and the inability to

comprehend the overall meaning of a passage. As a result, students often struggle to identify main ideas, interpret specific information, and understand contextual vocabulary. This condition reflects the students' low reading comprehension ability, which becomes a serious concern considering that reading is one of the essential skills in English language learning.

Second, the teaching methods commonly applied in the classroom still rely heavily on traditional approaches, where learning materials are mostly in the form of plain texts without visual elements. This approach tends to make reading activities less engaging, especially for students who are visual learners or easily distracted. The lack of stimulating media contributes to students' disinterest in reading activities, which in turn affects their comprehension. Without visual support, it becomes harder for students to understand the storyline, the setting, or the characters within a text—especially narrative texts that require imagination and interpretation. Therefore, more engaging and visually supportive media are needed to attract students' interest and facilitate their understanding of the reading content.

Third, even though digital comics have been recognized as a potentially effective instructional medium, their actual impact on students' reading comprehension in this particular school context has not been studied in depth. Previous studies have shown that digital comics can increase student engagement and enjoyment in reading, but there is still a

lack of specific research focusing on the changes in students' reading ability before and after using digital comics in the classroom setting. It is necessary to investigate whether the use of digital comics as reading material can bring significant improvement to students' comprehension, particularly in the context of narrative texts taught at the junior high school level. Therefore, this study is intended to explore the effect of digital comics on students' reading ability at SMPN 2 Gunung Talang, with the aim of providing a more empirical understanding of their effectiveness in the English learning process.

### **C. Limitation of The Problem**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the reading materials used in this study were limited to specific themes and titles of digital comics aligned with the junior high school English curriculum. The titles selected included *Hooky* (a magical adventure narrative), *Kids Are All Right* (which emphasizes family values and friendship), *Cerita Rakyat Jawa Tengah* (a traditional folktale from Central Java), and *The Red King* (an Asian folklore-inspired story that promotes environmental preservation). Due to this limited selection, the study's findings may not be generalizable to other themes, genres, or types of reading materials. Additionally, the study only assessed reading comprehension skills, including identifying main ideas, locating specific information, summarizing texts, interpreting vocabulary in context, and

understanding narrative structure. Other reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, or critical reading, were not addressed. Additionally, students were required to read the digital comics independently outside the classroom without direct instructional intervention from the teacher, which may have influenced their level of engagement and comprehension outcomes.

#### **D. Formulation of Problems:**

Based on the background, problem identification, and the research limitation, this study seeks to answer the following questions “Does the use of digital comics have a significant effect on the reading comprehension ability of students at Junior High School 2 Gunung Talang?.”

#### **E. Research Objectives**

Based on the formulation of the problem, this study aims to “Assess the effectiveness of using digital comics on students' reading comprehension ability at Junior High School 2 Gunung.”

## **F. Significance of The Study**

This study is expected to provide:

### **1. Theoretical Contribution:**

Insights into the role of digital comics as an instructional tool in enhancing reading comprehension.

### **2. Practical Contribution:**

#### **a. For Teachers:**

The study will provide valuable insights for teachers on how digital comics, when used independently by students at home, can complement traditional teaching methods and boost reading comprehension. This information can help teachers encourage students to utilize digital reading materials at home.

#### **b. For Students:**

Students will benefit by realizing the potential of digital comics to enhance their reading skills in an enjoyable, self-directed way. It may also motivate them to take more initiative in their learning by exploring engaging digital content at home.

#### **d. For Future Researchers:**

This study is expected to provide a foundation for future researchers who are interested in exploring the use of digital media, especially digital comics, in language learning. By presenting empirical evidence regarding the influence of digital comics on students' reading ability, this research may serve as a reference for further studies that aim to

develop or improve instructional media in English education. Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of investigation, such as by using a larger and more diverse sample, applying different research designs like experimental or quasi-experimental methods, or exploring other variables such as students' motivation, critical thinking, or long-term retention. Additionally, this study can inspire the development of more innovative and interactive reading materials that are tailored to students' needs and learning preferences in the digital age. It is hoped that future studies will continue to examine how digital tools can enhance the effectiveness and engagement of English language learning, especially in reading comprehension.

## **G. Key Terms**

### **1. Digital Comics**

Digital comics are a form of instructional media that integrate images and text to convey information in an engaging and interactive way. McCloud (1993) explains that comics, including their digital formats, function as a visual language that enhances comprehension by combining textual and pictorial elements. In an educational setting, digital comics can be used to simplify complex concepts, foster student interest, and provide a more enjoyable reading experience, particularly in language learning.

### **2. Reading Ability**



Reading ability refers to the capacity to understand, analyze, and interpret written texts effectively. Snow (2002) defines reading ability as a complex cognitive process that involves word recognition, fluency, and comprehension skills, which are essential for academic success. A strong reading ability enables learners to engage with texts critically, extract meaning efficiently, and apply the acquired knowledge in various contexts, making it a crucial skill in language learning and literacy development.

