

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

English is one of the important subjects taught at the junior high school level. At this level, English teaching is intended to help students develop their ability to understand and use English in different situations. In learning English, students need to develop four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills are connected to each other and support students in developing their overall English ability (Brown, 2007). Among these skills, reading is an important skill because it enables students to obtain information, ideas, and knowledge from written texts.

Reading is an important language skill because it helps learners understand information from written texts. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, reading is not merely the ability to recognize words, but also the ability to construct meaning from what is written (Grabe, 2014). Students need to understand the information presented in a text and connect it with their existing knowledge. Grabe (2019) explains that comprehension is a central goal of reading instruction because students are expected to understand and interpret the information they read. Therefore, reading instruction should help students develop their ability to understand the meaning of English texts.

The importance of reading and understanding meaning is also reflected in Islam. In Surah Al-'Alaq (96:1), Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala says:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

Read it with (mentioning) the name of your Lord who created," (QS. Al-'Alaq 96: Verse 1)

Based on this verse, Allah SWT commands Prophet Muhammad SAW to read. This command shows the importance of reading as a way to gain knowledge and understanding. Reading is therefore not only related to recognizing written words but also to understanding information and gaining knowledge. This concept is in line with the educational view of reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand and interpret the meaning of a text. It is a complex process that involves several abilities, such as understanding words, identifying information, connecting ideas, and making meaning from the text. In assessing reading comprehension, Nuttall (1982) identifies five important aspects, namely determining the main idea, finding specific information, identifying references, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary. Determining the main idea refers to the ability to identify the central point of a text. Finding specific information involves locating particular information stated in the text. Identifying references requires students to understand what a word or expression refers to in the text. Making inferences involves understanding information that is not directly stated but can be concluded from the text. Understanding vocabulary refers to

the ability to understand the meaning of words in the context of the text. These five aspects are important because they represent different abilities needed to understand a text comprehensively.

However, developing reading comprehension can be challenging for junior high school students. Students may have difficulties because of limited vocabulary, limited background knowledge, difficulty understanding sentence structures, and low interest in reading English texts. Vocabulary is particularly important because students who do not know enough words may have difficulty understanding the information and overall meaning of a text (Nation, 2017). Understanding grammar also helps readers understand how sentences are connected and what they mean (Ellis, 2015). In addition, background knowledge allows readers to connect new information with what they already know (Snow, 2018). When students have difficulties with these aspects, they may also have difficulties in understanding the main idea, finding specific information, identifying references, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary in a text.

In junior high school English learning, students are introduced to different types of texts. The teaching of texts helps students understand not only the information in a text but also how the text is organized. A genre-based approach can help students learn different types of texts, such as descriptive, recount, and narrative texts. Through this approach, students learn the purpose, organization, and language features of different genres (Hyland,

2018). Among these types of text, narrative text is one of the important genres taught in junior high school English classes.

Narrative text is a type of text that tells a story and is commonly taught in junior high school English classes. Its main purpose is to entertain readers and may also communicate moral or social lessons through stories (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). Narrative texts generally consist of an orientation, complication, and resolution. The orientation introduces the characters and setting, the complication presents a problem or conflict, and the resolution shows how the problem is solved. Because narrative texts contain characters, events, and a sequence of events, students need to understand both the information directly stated in the text and the meaning that can be inferred from it. Therefore, students need good reading comprehension to understand narrative texts successfully.

In reading narrative texts, the five aspects of reading comprehension are important. Students need to determine the main idea of the story, find specific information about the characters and events, identify references in the text, make inferences about events or characters, and understand the meaning of vocabulary based on the context. Therefore, reading instruction for narrative texts needs to provide activities that help students develop these five aspects of reading comprehension.

The importance of reading comprehension is also reflected in the English curriculum at the junior high school level. The Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes students' ability to understand information and meaning from

different types of texts, including multimodal texts. Therefore, reading activities should provide students with opportunities to understand texts and obtain information through different forms of representation. However, the expectations of the curriculum do not always match students' actual abilities in the classroom. Some students may still experience difficulties in understanding English texts, especially when the texts contain unfamiliar vocabulary or are presented in ways that are less interesting to them.

This condition was also found at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar. Based on preliminary research conducted by the researcher through a discussion with the English teacher at the school, students experienced several difficulties in English reading activities. The teacher explained that many students had limited vocabulary and were not very interested in reading English materials. Some students became bored during reading activities and found it difficult to understand stories written in English. These problems affected students' participation and their ability to understand narrative texts.

To help students with these reading difficulties, the English teacher at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar had used several teaching strategies, such as reading aloud, translating texts, using dictionaries, and answering comprehension questions. These strategies are commonly used in EFL classrooms to support students' comprehension (Harmer, 2015). The school also started an English Club as part of the Kurikulum Merdeka program to provide students with more exposure to English. However, despite these efforts, students still experienced difficulties in reading comprehension.

Therefore, there was a need for learning materials or media that could provide additional support and make reading activities more interesting for students.

The students' condition was also reflected in the data provided by the English teacher at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar. Based on the data obtained, Grade IX A consisted of 21 students, while Grade IX B consisted of 20 students. In Grade IX A, 7 students had achieved the learning objectives, while 14 students had not yet achieved them. Meanwhile, in Grade IX B, 8 students had achieved the learning objectives and 12 students had not yet achieved them.

Table 1.1
Data on the Achievement of Learning Objectives of Grade IX A and IX B Students

NO	Class	KKTP	Achieved the Learning Objectives	Not yet Achieved the Learning Objectives	Number of Students
1	IX A	66 - 100	7 Students	14 Students	21 Students
2	IX B	66 - 100	8 Students	12 Students	20 Students

Based on the KKTP established at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar, the score of 66–100 was used as the criterion for achieving the learning objectives. These data showed that many students in both classes had not yet achieved the expected learning objectives in English reading.

Thus, the problems found at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar showed that students' reading comprehension still needed improvement. The difficulties were related to limited vocabulary, low interest in reading, and difficulty understanding English narrative texts. These conditions indicated the need for an appropriate learning media that could support students' understanding while making reading activities more interesting and engaging.

One possible media that can be used to support English reading instruction is Webtoon. Webtoon has become one of the digital media familiar to many young learners who frequently use smartphones and other digital devices. Webtoon presents stories through a vertical scrolling format that combines pictures, dialogue, and story sequences (Kim & Yu, 2019). The combination of visual and verbal elements makes Webtoon different from conventional text because students can understand a story not only through written language but also through images that support the meaning. Recent studies have also shown that digital comics can provide language input and visual support that help learners understand texts more easily (Yang, 2021). Therefore, Webtoon has the potential to be used as a digital storytelling media in English language learning, particularly in reading activities.

As a digital learning media, Webtoon can support students' understanding of narrative texts by presenting stories through a combination of images and written language. This combination can help students connect information in the text with visual representations and understand how a story develops. Teachers can also use Webtoon to introduce vocabulary, show the

use of sentences in context, and help students understand the meaning of words through the events and characters in a story (Hafner, 2020). For example, students can examine the pictures and characters' dialogue to identify important information, understand the main points of a story, and make connections between events. Therefore, Webtoon can be considered a suitable digital learning media to support English reading instruction.

Several researchers have examined the use of Webtoon in English language learning. Previous studies include Erya and Pustika (2021), Widiyarti et al. (2021), Larisa et al. (2023), Tomaso et al. (2023), and Ghulam et al. (2023). These studies generally showed positive results regarding the use of Webtoon or digital comics to support students' reading comprehension, interest, motivation, and learning activities.

However, previous studies have not specifically focused on the use of Webtoon as digital narrative text media in relation to the five aspects of reading comprehension, namely determining the main idea, finding specific information, identifying references, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary. In addition, previous studies have mostly used qualitative, descriptive, or perception-based designs rather than a quantitative quasi-experimental design. Some studies also involved different educational levels from the ninth-grade junior high school students in this study. Therefore, there is still limited research examining the effect of using Webtoon as digital narrative text media on ninth-grade students' reading comprehension.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher was interested in examining the effect of using Webtoon as digital narrative text media on students' reading comprehension. Therefore, this study was conducted under the title “The Effect of Using Webtoon as Digital Narrative Text Media on Ninth Grade Students’ Reading Comprehension at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar.”

B. Identification of the Study

Based on the background above, the identification of the study can be identified as follows;

1. Students’ low reading comprehension ability. Students have difficulties in understanding English narrative texts due to limited vocabulary and comprehension skills.
2. Low motivation to read English texts. Many students are less interested in reading English texts because reading activities are difficult.
3. Limited use of digital learning media. Reading instruction still relies on conventional materials, with limited use of digital media that could support students’ reading comprehension.

C. Limitation of the Study

This study was limited to students’ reading comprehension. The narrative texts used in this study was a fairy tale and legend. The aspect of reading comprehension assessment in this study will focus based on theory

from Nuttal (1982) including; determining main idea, finding specific information, reference, inference, and vocabulary.

Furthermore, this study will be conducted with ninth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar.

D. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the identification of the study and the limitation of the study, the formulation of the problem is “Is there a significant effect of using Webtoon as a digital narrative text media on the reading comprehension of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar in the academic year of 2026/2027?”

E. Purpose of the Study

Based on the formulation of the problem, the purpose of the study is to determine whether there is a significant effect of using Webtoon as a digital narrative text media on the reading comprehension of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Danau Kembar in the academic year of 2026/2027.

F. Significance of the Study

1. Theoretically

The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of theories related to reading comprehension in English as a foreign language, particularly in the use of digital narrative text media. This study may provide empirical evidence on how visual-based digital media such as Webtoon can support students' reading comprehension. In line with multimedia learning theory proposed by Mayer (2009), the

combination of text and visuals can help learners understand information more effectively.

2. Practically

This study is expected to provide practical contributions to the following parties:

a. For English Teachers

The results of this study can serve as a reference for English teachers in using Webtoon as an alternative teaching media in reading lessons, especially for narrative texts. By using Webtoon, teachers may be able to create more engaging reading activities and help students understand texts more easily through visual support.

b. For Students

Through the use of Webtoon in reading activities, students are expected to find English reading lessons more interesting and enjoyable. The visual elements in Webtoon may help students understand the storyline, characters, and meaning of the text, which can improve their reading comprehension.

c. For School Institutions

This study may help school institutions and curriculum developers in considering the use of digital and technology-based learning media in English instruction. The findings can support schools in implementing innovative teaching approaches that align

with Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes student-centered and meaningful learning.

d. For Future Researchers

This study can be used as a reference for future researchers who are interested in conducting similar research on digital media, Webtoon, or reading comprehension. It may also encourage further studies that explore other text types, skills, or different levels of students using digital narrative media.

G. Definition of the Key Terms

1. Webtoon

Webtoon is a type of digital comic that is published and accessed online. According to Jang and Song (2017), the term “webtoon” is formed from the words “web” and “cartoon.” It refers to digital comics that developed in South Korea and are published through the internet. Webtoon combines visual and written elements to present stories in a digital format. In this study, Webtoon refers to a digital learning media used to support students in learning English, particularly in reading narrative texts.

2. Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand and construct meaning from a written text. According to Grabe and Stoller (2019), reading comprehension refers to the ability to understand information from a text accurately. It involves several processes, including

recognizing words, building a general meaning of the text, and identifying main ideas. Therefore, reading comprehension is not only about recognizing individual words but also about understanding the information and meaning presented in a text. In this study, reading comprehension refers to students' ability to understand narrative texts, which is measured through a reading comprehension test.

3. Narrative text

Narrative text is a type of text that tells a story to entertain the reader. According to Anderson and Anderson (2003), narrative texts tell about events involving characters and settings and are organized through stages such as orientation, complication, sequence of events, resolution, and coda. In this study, narrative text refers to story-based texts used as reading materials, while Webtoon is used as digital learning media to support students' understanding of the texts and their reading comprehension.