ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH COMIC IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The integral function of reading in fostering scientific literacy is crucial for enhancing pupils' reading proficiency. The utilization of English comics as an instructional medium is anticipated to have a beneficial impact on pupils due to its inherent ability to evoke feelings of happiness among readers. The objective of this study is to enhance the reading comprehension abilities of students in class XI PL SMKN 4 Medan by utilizing English comics as a medium. The present study constitutes a classroom action research that adheres to the research processes outlined in the John Elliot model. These procedures encompass preparation, action, observation, reflection, and evaluation activities. The findings indicated that the mean score for students' reading comprehension fell within the medium range, with a pre-lesson average of 62.70 (57.70%) when utilizing English comic media. Following the acquisition of reading skills and comprehension through the utilization of English entertaining media during the initial phase, there was a noticeable enhancement in the mean reading comprehension proficiency of students, reaching 70 (69.23%). However, it is important to note that this achievement still falls within the moderate range. During the second cycle, there was an observed improvement in students' reading comprehension ability, as evidenced by an increase in the average value and a percentage of 81.54 (88.46%) falling inside the very high group.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the prescribed curriculum, the successful attainment of English language learning objectives necessitates the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders engaged in the educational process within the school setting. This objective can be attained by means of engaging in reading activities. The significance of reading in the advancement of scientific knowledge cannot be overstated. Numerous individuals require assistance in comprehending the intended significance or informational content from the textual material they peruse. This

challenge is also observed among students inside the educational setting, particularly in the context of English language instruction.

The development of comprehension abilities is likely to occur through active help and guidance, particularly when engaging with reading materials written in a foreign language. In nations where English is taught as a foreign language, such as Taiwan, college students who struggle academically often lack certain skills, particularly in the areas of identifying and organizing important concepts. As a result, they require additional instruction in English reading to address these deficiencies (Tseng & Yeh, 2017). In order to enhance students' reading comprehension skills, particularly in the context of English language acquisition, it is imperative to devote attention to the challenges faced and the corresponding solutions required.

In Indonesia, students' reading comprehension skills at one of the Senior High Schools in Middle Halmahera still need to improve. Students need more visible motivation to practice reading skills, especially reading English texts (Kaganang, 2019). It also happened where the research would be conducted, namely SMKN 4 Medan. Students at SMKN 4 Medan, especially those who will participate in the research, need higher reading comprehension. It can be seen when researchers carry out the learning process in class. Reading is one of the most important language skills besides the other three language skills. *Reading comprehension* is defined by Compton & Pearson (2016) as "the process of extracting and constructing meaning simultaneously through interaction and engagement with written language".

One of the primary concerns that necessitates attention is the insufficient level of pupils' engagement with English texts, indicating a need for improvement. The English language proficiency of certain students remains insufficient, falling below the minimal proficiency standards set by SMKN 4 Medan. The proficiency in reading comprehension plays a significant role in determining the attainment of learning objectives as per the minimal proficiency standards in English classes at SMKN 4 Medan.

The utilization of comic media has the potential to enhance students' reading proficiency. The presence of comics as a medium is anticipated to have a beneficial impact on students due to its inherent ability to evoke feelings of joy in readers. The inclination of students towards visual storytelling lends significance to the necessity of using humorous media in educational contexts. According to Harbi (2016), comic media is anticipated to facilitate the enhancement

of students' language abilities and artistic talents, as well as aid them in the comprehension and recollection of the narratives included within. Within the realm of literature, comic media has the potential to foster a multitude of benefits for students. It can serve as a catalyst for promoting reading habits, enhancing vocabulary acquisition, and offering direction in the development of expressive skills. The visual nature of comics plays a significant role in facilitating these outcomes.

Although many studies have discussed the use of comics as a medium for learning English, little have discussed improving students' reading comprehension in vocational high schools. Based on the description of the problem above, one of the efforts to improve students' reading comprehension skills in English is to use English comic media, where comic media is used as a learning tool because comic media is a book that is popular from children to adulthood.

The focus of the problem in this classroom action research is "how to improve students' reading comprehension skills by using comic media". Given the importance of students having good reading comprehension, this study aims to improve students' reading comprehension skills through comic media. This classroom action research is expected to be useful for educational staff, especially for students. Comic media for learning English independently and cooperatively are expected to improve reading comprehension skills, especially in learning English. Then for English teachers, as an alternative learning media for teaching, especially in learning English. As well as schools, as inspiration and reference in improving the quality of learning, especially English subjects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension refers to the cognitive skill of effectively engaging with written material, comprehending its intended message, and seamlessly incorporating it into the reader's existing knowledge base. The cognitive process of active engagement enables the reader to generate meaning from written text. Reading comprehension is predicated upon two interconnected abilities: word reading and language understanding. According to Qureshi and Aljanadbah (2022), the process of comprehension is a complex and creative one that relies on four key language skills, namely phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Overall, reading

comprehension is a critical skill that significantly impacts literacy and education. Through good reading comprehension, individuals can access knowledge, think critically, and actively participate in various social and cultural life aspects. Therefore, reading comprehension remains an essential focus in educational research and practice.

Comics, in the context of learning, have shown some significant benefits. First of all, comics can stimulate the imagination and creativity of students. Visual elements in comics help visualize complex concepts and ideas, making it easier for students to understand the information presented. It is especially beneficial for students with a visual or auditory learning style (Harbi, 2016). In addition, comics can help students build relationships between different content, identify patterns, and understand relationships between concepts better. Comics can also increase students' motivation and interest in learning. Text presented in an attractive visual form can make learning more fun and interactive. The engaging nature of comics can reduce boredom and increase student participation in learning. These enjoyable learning experiences can positively impact student class engagement and academic outcomes (Issa, 2017).

However, the effectiveness of using comics as a learning medium is also debated. Some critics argue that comics may only be suitable for some learning or subject matter. Comics are better suited for presenting conceptual information than highly technical or detailed information (Issa, 2017). In addition, the effectiveness of comics as learning media can also depend on the design of the cartoon itself, such as the use of relevant images and clear text. The teacher's role in integrating comics into learning is also essential. Teachers need to be able to select and design comics that suit the learning objectives and student characteristics. In addition, the teacher's role in guiding discussion and reflection on comic content is also significant in ensuring in-depth understanding.

Previously, many have researched the use of comics as a learning medium. The research conducted by Sari & Salam (2017) examined the implementation of comic media development in learning English for reading recount text acquisition. Then, research conducted by Rachminingsih & Hanif (2020) discusses comics as a medium for learning the concept of English tenses and aspects. Furthermore, Herdyana (2022) also researched the effectiveness of using comics as a learning medium to improve student learning outcomes. Wahyudin et al. (2020) also researched the use of toondoo digital comics in learning English at the high school

level. Zalmansyah's research (2013) focused on increasing students' vocabulary by using comic strips as a medium for learning English.

METHOD

This Classroom Action Research is carried out by following the research procedures of the John Elliot model, which includes planning, action, observation, and reflection. Classroom action research is a rigorous and systematic scientific research endeavor that involves reflective empirical investigation of the actions undertaken by educational staff, such as teachers or lecturers, in collaboration with a research team and researchers. This research activity encompasses various stages, starting from the development of a well-structured plan to the evaluation of actual classroom actions in the form of learning activities. The ultimate goal of action research is to enhance and improve the learning conditions that are implemented within educational settings (Pavez, 2021).
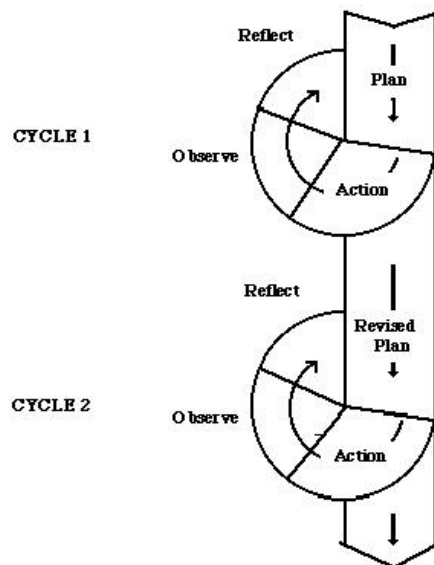

Figure 1. John Elliot's Classroom Action Research Model

This classroom action research was carried out at SMKN 4 Medan for the even semester of the 2022-2023 academic year from May to July 2023. The research subjects were taken from class XI PL SMKN 4 Medan, comprising 13 students. The researcher chose class XI PL because it was seen from the learning outcomes of English subjects were still low, especially in reading ability.

The formula used to calculate the average score of students' reading comprehension test results:

$$X = \frac{\sum x}{\sum N}$$

Information:

X = average value

$\sum x$ = the sum of all student scores

$\sum N$ = the number of students who took the test

This study also uses observation to know the activity of students and teachers during learning takes place by using percentage formula.

$$\text{Mark} = \frac{\text{Total Gain Score}}{\text{Maximum Total Score}} \times 100$$

Then categorized using the criteria in the table below.

Table 1. Criteria for Results of Teacher Teaching Activities Using Comic Media

No	Value Range	Criteria
1	35-46	Very good
2	23-34	Good
3	11-22	Enough
4	1-10	Not enough

The present study was carried out in partnership with English educators at SMKN 4 Medan. The cycle is implemented based on the modifications experienced by students, as designed according to the examined elements (student factors), in order to assess their proficiency in comprehending the English reading material of class XI PL SMKN 4 Medan. Prior to the instructional cycle, students are administered an initial assessment without being exposed to educational materials presented in the form of comic media.

Furthermore, at the stage per cycle during learning, students are given treatment, namely learning reading comprehension skills using comic media. In the first cycle, the comics used are

colorless comics. While in the second cycle, the comics used are colored comics. The English comic media used is instructional comic media designed and developed through research and validation tests by media, language, and content experts. Learning reading comprehension using comic media is done with two cycles and four face-to-face meetings. Allocation the time used for each cycle during 2x45 minutes face-to-face learning. If the results of the second cycle test are considered not complete, the research will proceed to the cycle next.

Implementing classroom action research is carried out through planning, action, observation, and reflection or evaluation. These four stages take place repeatedly in the form of a cycle, namely (1) the planning stage, includes (a) analyzing and studying the syllabus for English subjects used by teachers at SMKN 4 Medan, (b) preparing a lesson plan by applying learning media, namely media English comics, (c) designing and conditioning the class during classical learning, (d) compiling the application of interactive learning, (e) compiling research instruments (test of interest and reading habits, pre-test, observation sheet, and final ability test reading comprehension), (f) arranging student study groups; and (g) planning group assignments when necessary; (2) the stages of taking action, including (a) preliminary activities, (b) core activities, and (c) closing activities; (3) the observation stage, includes (a) collaborating with the English teacher to carry out observation activities during the implementation of learning to read using English comic media, (b) noting any findings from students during the learning process of reading comprehension using English comic media, (c) discuss with the English teacher after completing the lesson to complete the weaknesses, deficiencies, and findings during the implementation of reading comprehension learning using English comic media.

The subsequent stage, referred to as the reflection stage, encompasses several key components. Firstly, it involves the analysis of weaknesses, deficiencies, and findings that emerged during the implementation of reading comprehension learning utilizing English comic media. Secondly, it entails engaging in discussions with the English teacher to strategize and plan future activities aimed at addressing the identified weaknesses, deficiencies, and findings. Thirdly, it necessitates reflecting upon the outcomes of observations conducted from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. Lastly, it involves the revision and adjustment of learning improvement plans, which will be executed during subsequent meetings and cycles if the desired results have not been achieved, as indicated by the success indicators outlined in this research.

The measure of achievement in this classroom-based research pertains to the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) established for the English subject at SMKN 4 Medan, which is set at 70 as the threshold for individual proficiency. The improvement in students' reading comprehension success rate in English typically exceeded 75%, with a majority of students achieving a score of 70 or higher.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The initial results of the reading comprehension ability of class XI PL SMKN 4 Medan are still low when viewed from the Minimum Completeness Criteria for students' English learning outcomes. It can be seen from the reading comprehension test (pre-action) with a the discourse text named "Earthquakes" was attended by a total of 13 students. The average score achieved by the students was 62.70, with the greatest score being 80 and the lowest score being 45. Three students (57.70%) achieved a score that met the minimum passing threshold (KKM), while eleven students (42.30%) had scores below the KKM. The obtained score of the students reflects their reading comprehension abilities before to the intervention, with an average score of 62.70 (57.70%) falling within the medium group.

The initial phase of the teacher's instructional sequence involved the use of English comedic media and an English discourse text sheet titled "Garfield". The instructor commenced a session lasting around 50 minutes, during which they proceeded to engage in a comprehensive examination of the reading comprehension lesson through the use of English comedy media. Students are instructed to orally articulate the phonetic rendering of the lexemes inside the narrative of the graphic narrative and collectively engage in the act of reading the textual material in the English language. Prior to providing comments, students are initially given the opportunity to recount the narrative events depicted in the comic, even in cases when they have not fully read the entirety of the comic's story.

This approach aims to facilitate students' comprehension of the discourse only via visual examination of the comic's illustrations. The instructor commends pupils who voluntarily participate by raising their hands and articulating the requested information, while harboring lingering uncertainties. The aforementioned chance elicited affirmative gestures from fellow students, signifying their comprehension of their peers' discourse, despite it being conducted in

the Indonesian language. Following the acquisition of reading comprehension skills through the utilization of English comic media during the initial phase, students were administered a reading comprehension assessment. The collective average score for students' reading comprehension shown an improvement, reaching 70 (69.23%). However, it is worth noting that the outcomes remained within the moderate range.

Based on the outcomes and discoveries of the initial phase, enhancements and strategies were established to initiate measures in the subsequent phase. In the second phase of the instructional process, the educator provided students with instruction on English reading comprehension through the utilization of English comic media with visually appealing illustrations. The instructor also imparted the subject matter of comedic narratives. In addition, students were instructed to engage in a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter or underlying theme of the English comedy narrative text throughout their discussion. The collaborator sometimes provides guidance to the English instructor in order to facilitate the relationship between students and the teacher, as well as the overall classroom environment. Additionally, the collaborator oversees and ensures the active engagement of students in all learning activities. Following the instructional session, a further engagement involved a discourse wherein inquiries were posed and subsequently addressed pertaining to the narrative elements contained within the comic. The instructor permits students to orally and in written form recount the narrative's substance through the medium of a comic. Students' reading comprehension ability increases in the average score and percentage of 81.54 (88.46%) in the very high category. The reading comprehension ability of class XI PL SMKN 4 Medan has increased from each cycle.

Moreover, the utilization of English comic media in language acquisition appears to offer an engaging, participatory, and enjoyable environment for enhancing reading comprehension skills within the classroom setting. After the initial classroom planning, a series of action research cycles were conducted, consisting of two cycles and four in-person sessions. The outcomes achieved aligned with the predetermined indicators established by the researchers. The success rate of students in reading comprehension has traditionally exhibited an upward trend, with a minimum score of 75% achieved by the majority of students who earned at least 70%. Further information can be observed in the subsequent table.

Table 2. Average Score and Percentage of Reading Completeness

Understanding of Pre-Cycle and Per-Cycle Students

No	Cycle	Average value	Completeness	Category
1	Pre Cycle	62,70	57,70%	Currently
2	Cycle 1	70	69,23%	Currently
3	Cycle 2	81,54	88,46%	Very high

The aforementioned findings are consistent with the discourse around the utilization of comic media for educational purposes, a topic that has been extensively explored by various scholars. For instance, Sari and Salam (2017) conducted a study named "Implementation of Comic Media Development in Learning English for Acquisition of Reading Recount Text" to delve into this subject matter. Based on the research findings and the theoretical framework described, the development of comic media in acquiring recount text reading skills has proven to be influential and significant in helping grade VIII students of SMPN 11 Pontianak's acquisition of recount text reading skills. So it can be concluded that most students responded positively to using comic media in learning recount text. It can happen because they feel helped in understanding recount text reading with visuals (pictures), especially in guessing gaps they don't know.

The results of this study are also by Herdyana's research (2022) concerning "Effectiveness of Using Comics as a Learning Media to Improve Student Learning Outcomes" The results obtained were that the students' pretest scores in the experimental class before the utilization of thematic comics yielded an average score of 61.50. In the interim, the average post-test scores of the students who utilized themed comics amounted to 87.00. The initial assessment score of the students in the control group was recorded as 65.00, however the subsequent evaluation score in the control group was seen to be 74.50. The findings indicated that there was a significant difference in student learning outcomes based on the post-test data. This conclusion was drawn due to the fact that the t-value was statistically significant (tcount = 0.000) and the significance level (2-tailed) was less than 0.05. Additionally, the positive t-value further supported the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0). The evidence suggests that the utilization of comics is highly efficacious in enhancing educational achievements.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and analysis, it was determined that the utilization of comic media for English reading comprehension instruction yielded positive outcomes. Specifically, the reading comprehension abilities of class XI PL SMKN 4 Medan exhibited improvement throughout the initial cycle, with a recorded increase of 70 (69.23%) which falls within the medium proficiency range. The second cycle of students' reading comprehension skills shown a notable improvement in their learning results, with an average value and percentage of 81.54 (88.46%) falling into the very high group.

One initial recommendation that the researcher can propose is for students to cultivate a habit of engaging with written materials and actively seeking out instances of tangible texts, as well as novel encounters, in order to foster proficiency and enjoyment in reading, particularly in the context of English literature. Furthermore, the adoption of a facilitator role by professors might enhance students' autonomy in the learning process. Educators possess enhanced proficiency and adeptness in employing engaging instructional techniques and multimedia resources, as empirical evidence substantiates the efficacy of incorporating comedic media into educational contexts, particularly for enhancing students' reading comprehension skills, particularly in the domain of English language acquisition. Furthermore, it is recommended that educational institutions implement a mandatory policy wherein teachers across all subjects utilize instructional media as a means to enhance student learning outcomes at SMKN 4 Medan.

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