

# The Use of Digital Comics for Improving Reading Comprehension in English as a Foreign Language: A Systematic Review

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i2.2283>

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## A B S T R A C T

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. However, the lack of vocabulary, low interest, and uninteresting reading materials still make it difficult for many students to comprehend English texts. Digital comics have become a promising learning medium because they combine text and visuals in an interesting way. The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of digital comics in enhance the reading comprehension of EFL students. This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework. Fourteen relevant studies published between 2022 and 2026 were selected from Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and Manual searches. The selected studies were analyzed using narrative synthesis. The results showed that students' reading comprehension was improved by digital comic, especially when it involves comprehending important ideas, identifying specific details, learning new vocabulary, and interpreting texts. Additionally, digital comics improved student confidence, motivation, and participation in reading activities. In conclusion, digital comics are an effective and innovative learning medium for improving reading comprehension in EFL classrooms.

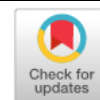
**Keywords:** *Digital Comic, Reading Comprehension, EFL Students, Learning Media*

### Article History:

Received 18<sup>th</sup> March 2026

Accepted 27<sup>th</sup> April 2026

Published 28<sup>th</sup> April 2026



## INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most important skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it helps students understand the information, interpret the meaning, and developed language competence. According to one early definition of reading comprehension, reading is a communication process in which messages are visually transmitted from the writer to the reader. Successful reading comprehension is largely dependent on the reader's capacity to decipher written symbols in order to create meaning, much like one interprets the meaning of an abstract piece of art. It is challenging to define, teach, or evaluate reading comprehension since it is a complicated process (Israel, 2005). Reading comprehension refers to the ability to read, analyze, and understand a text. Grabe, W. & Stoller, F. L. at (Julianti & Salam, 2020) suggest that reading comprehension refers to understanding the meaning of a text after reading it. suggest that reading for general understanding can improve information comprehension and interpretation. Reading can lead to mental speculation about the written content. Reading comprehension is essential for making sense of text.

Reading comprehension, as used in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), is the capacity of students to comprehend, analyze, and create meaning from English texts using complex cognitive processes. In addition to identifying words or sentence structures, reading comprehension requires the reader to make connections between the text's content and what they already know. However, a number of challenges, including a limited vocabulary, a lack of exposure to real texts, and the complexity of English language structures, frequently limit EFL students' ability to develop this skill. Success is also hampered by low

reading motivation and the use of less engaging teaching strategies. Therefore, reading instruction in EFL context requires more interesting, relevant, and engaging methods and learning materials to help students better understand texts, (Oktavianti et al., 2026).

Technology integration has been shown to increase student engagement and motivation in EFL classrooms. It also creates opportunities for a more interactive and motivating learning process in response to the challenges faced by EFL students in comprehending texts (Afriyeni et al., 2025; Majid et al., 2025; Marsevani et al., 2024). Digital learning materials are becoming a more popular substitute for traditional methods of teaching reading. The use of digital comics as a teaching tool is one innovation that is thought to be promising for EFL reading education. Digital comics can make it easier and more enjoyable for students to comprehend reading content by combining text, tale narratives, and visual elements in an engaging approach. According to research, the interactive and visual elements of digital comics improve learner motivation and engagement while also facilitating understanding, making reading activities more attractive than traditional resources (Afandi et al., 2025). Additionally, students believe that digital comic books are more entertaining and engaging in reading classes, which can improve reading habits and student engagement (Ramadhan et al., 2022; Anggraeni & Nurharini, 2023) With these characteristics, digital comics have a great chance to develop into a useful teaching tool for improving EFL students' motivation and reading comprehension.

The potential of digital comics as an instructional tool for enhancing students' reading comprehension in EFL contexts has been shown in a several studies. (Utami et al., 2025) created digital comics using Canva for their study on elementary school students, and they discovered that this medium effectively improved student reading comprehension abilities. Students were inspired to participate more actively in the learning process and were able to comprehend reading materials more readily thanks to the comics' inclusion of appealing images and well-organized stories. The usage of digital comics in senior high school reading classes was also examined by (Taka, 2022), who found that students who used digital comics demonstrated more understanding than those who utilized traditional reading materials. These results suggest that in EFL reading classrooms, digital comics can be a creative substitute for conventional text-based learning.

Digital comics have been shown to enhance understanding and have a good impact on students' literacy development and general learning outcomes. (Sito Resmi et al., 2022) created digital comic media with the objective of enhancing primary school students' literacy skills, comprehension of the content they read, and academic performance. According to the study, student comprehension of reading materials was improved by digital comics, which also made learning more engaging and interesting. Digital comics have been shown to enhance students' interest in reading activities and decrease boredom by combining dialogue, visuals, and plots. This implies that in addition to serving as supplemental tools, digital comics can significantly improve students' reading abilities and drive for learning a new language.

The effect of digital comics on affective components of reading, such motivation and anxiety, has also been studied in more recent studies. The impact of webtoon-based reading on EFL students' reading comprehension and reading anxiety was investigated by (Siswoyo & Wandira, 2026) according to their research, using digital comics helped students understand more and experience less nervous when reading texts written in English. This demonstrates that for EFL students, especially those traditional reading materials, digital comics provide a more encouraging and less intimidating environment. When considered collectively, these studies imply that digital comics offer variety of educational advantages, such as emotional, motivational, and cognitive benefits. Despite this encouraging result, the literature is still dispersed across many context and educational levels, suggesting the necessity for a systematic review to collect the most recent data on the benefits of digital comic for EFL reading comprehension.

However, the majority of previous studies only examines specific contexts, academic achievement levels, or small participant groups. It is still challenging to compare and generalize the data because they are spread over several studies. Furthermore, just a few of

research have achieved a decision to fully investigate and collect the result related to the use of digital comics in EFL reading instruction. To provide an increased understanding of efficacy, advantages and challenges of digital comics in enhancing reading comprehension in EFL contexts, a systematic literature review is therefore needed.

## METHOD

To ensure scientific transparency, reproducibility, and rigor, this study employed a qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA 2020 statement (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses*) (Page et al., 2021). This study focused on peer-reviewed online publications related to the use of digital comics in improving EFL students' reading comprehension. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of digital comics in enhancing EFL students' reading comprehension, identify study trends, pedagogical implications, research gaps, and future research directions, narrative synthesis was used to integrate and interpret the results of the chosen studies.

Searches were conducted across Google Scholar ERIC, and ScienceDirect – supplemented by manual searches through references tracing and citation chaining. The following Boolean string was applied consistently across database:

Table 1. Table 1

No	Search Engine/Database	Number of Articles Found (n)
1	Google Scholar	43
2	ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)	2
3	Manual Search (reference tracing and citation chaining)	20
4	ScienceDirect	4
	Total	69

Four databases were used to find 69 articles in total. The greatest number of records (n = 43) came from Google Scholar, followed by Manual Searches (n = 20), ScienceDirect (n = 4), and ERIC (n = 2). This multi-source approach reduced the possibility of excluding relevant research and guaranteed complete coverage. The selected studies were analyzed using narrative synthesis to identify patterns, similarities, and differences related to reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and engagement.

The PRISMA 2020 guidelines had been observed to during the study selection procedure. Figure 1 shows the entire process of identification, screening, and eligibility evaluation.

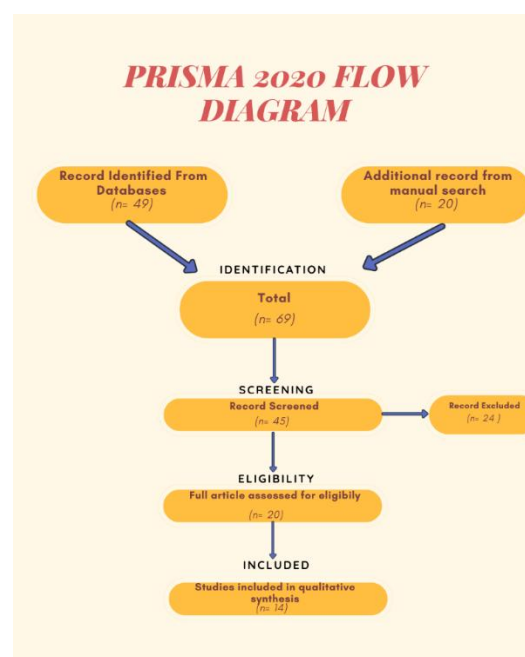


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process.

To ensure objectivity and accuracy, the study selection procedure followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. A total of 69 articles were identified in the initial stage after 49

records were found in electronic databases and 20 more items were found through manual searches. After the removal of irrelevant studies, 45 articles remained for title and abstract screening. Twenty full-text articles were then evaluated for eligibility based on the relevance to EFL reading comprehension and digital comics. Finally, 14 research articles matched all inclusion criteria after a thorough examination, and the results were added to the qualitative synthesis. This systematic process ensured that only relevant and methodologically sound studies were analyzed. As a result, the review offers reliable support for pedagogical findings and consequences in EFL environments in particular.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of all of the research shows that there is increasing scholarly interest in using digital comics as a teaching tool to enhance the reading comprehension of EFL students. The examination of these articles demonstrates a range of methodological techniques, from descriptive and mixed-methods research to experimental and quasi-experimental studies, which together offer insights into the pedagogical, cognitive, and motivational aspects of using digital comics in reading instruction. According to studies, using different digital comic platforms and formats—like Webtoon, digital comics created with Canva, and other interactive comic media—has been demonstrated to improve learning motivation, improve student comprehension, and make reading entertaining and engaging. These results repeatedly show that digital comics can improve reading issues frequently faced by EFL students, improve student engagement, and make it easier for students to understand the meaning of the text. The key features and outcomes of the articles examined in this study are compiled in the following table to give a more methodical picture of how these findings appear in various investigations.

Table 2. Table 2

No	Title	Author(s)	year	Research approach	Result
1.	English comic as Reading Material and Intervention improving students Reading Comprehension.	Marilou Bugtong, Zenia Milio, Peter Paul Canuto, Yuvimin Lumidao, Marites Choycawen, Deborah Lumecio, Daisy Bando	2025	Qualitative	Sig
2	Digital Comics (Webtoon) for EFL Reading Comprehension: Learners Preferences and Perceptual Factor	Muhammad Rizal Afandi, Putu Dian Danayanti Degeng	2025	Quantitative	Sig
3.	The Effect of Digital Comic on Student's Reading Comprehension of Vocational School Students	Hanif Elmo Raharja	2023	Quantitative	Sig
4	The Effect of Digital Comic Books on Reading Comprehension	Aris Firnanda, Muhammad Usman, Faudi	2023	Quantitative	Sig
5	The Use of Digital Comics on Students' Reading Comprehension of Narrative Texts	Mainar Fitri, Puan Aerosa Hasibuan, Nurzena, Murny	2023	Quantitative	Sig
6	Development of Digital Comic on Thematic Learning to Improve Literature Skills of 5th Grade Students in Elementary School	Pratiwi Kartika Sari, Siti Arofatinajah, Otto Fajarianto	2022	Quantitative	Sig
7	The Impact of Digital Comic Strip in the 4 th Grade Young Learners' Reading Comprehension in Singaraja	Viona Meilly Wijaya	2025	Quantitative	Sig
8	Digital Comic Media for Reading Comprehension of Fifth-Grade Students	Muhammad Zidna Miqdad, Andarini Permata Cahyaningtyas, Abdul Halim bin Masnan	2026	Quantitative	Sig

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9	The Effect of Using Digital Comic Strips in Reading on Young Learners	Ni Putu Ayu Puspa Yuliandari	2025	Quantitative	Sig
10	EFL Students' Practices in Exploring Digital Comics: Extensive Reading Activities at English Club	Muhammad Rizky Sholehudin	2025	Qualitative	Sig
11.	The Effect of Webtoon-Based Reading on EFL Students' Reading Comprehension and Reading Anxiety	Dwi Nur Hadiyansah W.S., Septiana Wandira	2025	Quantitative	Sig
12	Development of Digital-Based Comic Media to Improve Literature, Reading Understanding and Learning Outcomes in Class III Students Primary School	Wimbo Sirating Sito Resmi, Agus Nuryatin, Lita Latiana	2022	Quantitative	Sig
13	The Efficacy of Using Digital Comics in Reading Class to Senior High School Students	Soleman Dapa Taka	2022	Quantitative	Sig
14	Digital Comic Media Design Using Canva to Improve Elementary School Students' Reading Comprehension Skill	Monita Utami Alfroki Martha, Ismira Ismira	2025	Quantitative	Sig

A frequent argument shows that digital comics have an incredible amount of potential for improving motivation, enhance reading comprehension, and make learning more interesting. A significant amount of research show that using digital comics significantly and favorably improves students' reading abilities, especially in vocabulary acquisition, text comprehension, and reading fluency. A lack in the long-term empirical validation of the usage of digital comics in larger educational contexts is also revealed by a greater number of small-scale studies with experimental and descriptive designs. Furthermore, while the majority of studies emphasize the usefulness and efficacy of digital comics, very few critically assess how long-lasting learning effects are, how successful they are in comparison to other digital media, or how difficult it is for teachers to continuously use this strategy.

### Improvement in Reading Comprehension

Digital comics improve students' reading comprehension in EFL contexts, according to the reviewed studies. Regarding the application of digital comics, the majority of experimental research found significant differences between the experimental and control groups' post-test score (Elmo Raharja, 2023; Fitri et al., n.d.). In general students who learned through digital comics generally performed better than those students who used traditional reading method. These result showed that digital comic's can improve students' comprehension of English texts and have a beneficial effect on their reading achievement.

Digital comics were proven to create positive impact on any educational levels. Digital comics were shown to improve reading comprehension in elementary, junior high, and senior high school environments (Bugtong et al., 2025; Sito Resmi et al., 2022; Taka, 2022; Utami et al., 2025). The finding of the research were mostly consistent with the differences in the context and participants. After learning through digital comics, students on any levels were able to comprehend text faster, identify crucial information, and provide better answers to comprehension questions.

Several studies also found that digital comics improve students' ability to understand the main ideas and specific details of a text. Students are supported with creating a relationship between word meanings and the story's context through the use of conversation, visual, and plots. Students are better able to comprehend the text's general meaning and follow the events more clearly (Firmanda & Usman, 2023; Kartika Sari et al., 2022). This means that reading digital comics is both more engaging and easier to comprehend.

Studies using the N-Gain approach showed the efficacy of digital comics. According to on study, digital comics significantly improved students' reading comprehension with an N-Gain score 0.8017, which was categorized as "significant" (Meilly Wijaya, 2025). Digital comics were categorized as "very valid" and "very practical" after being used in classrooms, according to the additional research and development studies (Afandi et al., 2025). These result

showed that digital comics are useful in actual classroom setting in addition to being effective in theory.

Overall, the reviewed studies consistently showed that digital comics can be used as an effective reading medium in EFL classrooms. The positive results were not limited to any specific school approach or student group. Digital comics enhance students' reading comprehension, enable improved text comprehension, and produced superior learning outcomes, according to most of the research.

### **Vocabulary Acquisition and Text Understanding**

According to several studies, digital comics support text comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Because the visuals offered information about the words' meanings, students were able to comprehend new vocabulary easier. Students could conclude the meaning of new words from the visuals and narrative setting rather than depending on dictionaries or teacher explanations.

Students were also able to comprehend texts deeper because of an effective combination of conversation, picture, and story structure. It would be easier for students to understand how characters, actions, and events relate to one another. This made it simpler for them to recognize crucial details, follow the storyline, and comprehend the text's meaning. According to (Miqdad et al., 2026; Sholehudin, 2025) students who used digital comics were also better able to comprehend challenging reading passages because the images simplified the language.

Independent learning was also found to be improved by digital comics. Because they could use the visual components to comprehend the text's meaning, students became less dependent on teacher explanations. According to a research (Utami et al., 2025) students who used digital comics were encouraged to read more difficult and long texts. These results show that digital comics assist students in creating long-term reading habits in addition to increasing their vocabulary.

### **Student Motivation and Engagement**

The beneficial effect of digital comics on student motivation and engagement was another significant conclusion from the analyzed studies. According to (Afandi et al., 2025; Ramadhan et al., 2022; Anggraeni & Nurharini, 2023), using digital comics in the classroom increased students' enthusiasm in reading assignments. Because digital comics offered colorful images, simple language, and engaging plots, students noticed that digital comics are more attractive and enjoyable than traditional reading materials.

Digital comics also improved students' engagement in reading lessons. Students were more motivated to finish reading tasks, participated more actively in class discussions, and answered teacher questions with higher confidence. Digital comics produced a more engaging and dynamic learning environment than traditional text-only materials.

Digital comics were proven to be motivating at all educational levels. Because the comics were visually engaging, elementary school students were more eager to read, while secondary school students valued simple and contextual presentation of the material. These results imply that digital comics may improve students' motivation and classroom engagement in addition to assisting students with reading comprehension.

### **Reading Anxiety and Emotional Response**

The impact of digital comics on students' emotional reactions during reading lessons was also observed in some research. When asked to read English texts, students often feel anxiety due to their fear of making mistakes, foreign language, and complicated sentence patterns. However, a number of studies discovered that digital comics helped students feel more relaxed and less anxious when reading English literature (Afandi et al., 2025; Zarwan & Hardiansyah, 2019).

When reading English texts, students felt relaxed and less scared because of the comics offered. The illustrations and narratives made it easier for students to comprehend the material. This result is in accordance with the findings of (Siswoyo & Wandira, 2026), who discovered that students' anxiety when reading English texts decreased by using webtoon-based reading. The illustrations and narratives made it easier for students to comprehend the material. The

pressure that students typically experience when reading traditional text-only materials was lessened by this situations.

Additionally, students' confidence in handling English texts increased because of digital comics. According to several of the studies, employing digital comics made students less nervous of making mistakes and more motivated to engage in reading activities (Ramadhan et al., 2022; Anggraeni & Nurharini, 2023). Students were more motivated to engage in class activities, read longer passages, and respond to comprehension questions. These results suggest that EFL students benefit emotionally as well as cognitively from digital comics.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analyzed research consistently showed the effectiveness of digital comics in enhancing the reading comprehension of EFL students. Digital comprehension of EFL students. Digital comics make it easier for students to comprehend main ideas, identify specific information, learn new vocabulary, and analyze texts. Students are able to comprehend texts in a more contextual and relevant way if words, stories, and images are combined. Digital comics have been shown to have beneficial effects in elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. Furthermore, it has been found that using digital comics in classroom learning activities is trustworthy, useful, and successful. Additionally, students can improve emotionally and motivationally from digital comics. Because digital comics are more attractive and enjoyable than traditional reading materials, students feel more engaged, enthusiastic, and self-confidence throughout reading activities. Additionally, using digital comics helps students feel more at ease when reading English literature and lessens their reading anxiety. As a result, in EFL reading lessons, digital comics can be considered as a contemporary and successful teaching tool that fosters students' cognitive, emotional, and motivational development.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to sincerely thank everyone who helped to complete this study. A particular grant from a public, private, or independent funding organization was obtained for this study. The author would like to thank academic supervisors and lecturers for their invaluable advice and help in preparing this article. Since they provided valuable references and insights, gratitude is also given to earlier scholars whose work was examined and mentioned in this study. Lastly, the author expresses gratitude to family and coworkers for their unwavering encouragement and support during the research and writing phases.

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