# THE USE OF ENGLISH COMIC BOOK SERIES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

**Winda Apriani**
winda.apriani@yahoo.co.id

**Machdalena Vianty**
machdalena.vianty@gmail.com

**Bambang A.L**.
loenetobambang@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The objectives of this study were to find out whether or not the use of English Comic Book series could improve reading comprehension of the seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 32 Palembang. In this study, one group pre-test and post-test control group design was applied. The population was 170 seventh grade students in academic year 2013/2014. Purposive sampling method was applied and class VII.1 (N=34) and class VII.2 (N=34) were involved as the sample. The data were analyzed by using t-test. The result of the data analysis showed that the mean difference of the pre test and post test of the experimental group was significant ($p < 0.05$). The result of the independent sample t-test also showed that the mean differences of the post test of experimental group and control group were significant ($p < 0.05$). These results confirmed that the use of English Comic book series could be used as a reading material to help the seven graders of SMP Negeri 32 improve their reading comprehension. In addition, the result of this study showed that using a variety of reading materials in teaching reading comprehension is important.

**Key words**: *reading comprehension, English Comic book series*

English is one of the international languages that is used as a means of communication among countries in the world. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language and is taught as a compulsory subject at the secondary school. The teaching of English includes the four language skills; they are listening, speaking, reading and writing. They are taught and learned integratedly. For example, when students are reading, they can also focus on speaking by discussing what they have read with peers or teacher. According to Zwiers (2004), the purpose of reading is to construct meaning of the text, the students look at the letters, words, and sentences then they can understand and comprehend the reading text.

Reading and also the other language skills have an important role in EFL learning. According to Gallik (1999), reading is a corner-stone for success in school and also throughout life, the ability to read provides the opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success. In addition, Ediger (2011) states that reading is considered very valuable in the context of a foreign language learning because it is one of the main sources for students to obtain the input language. In addition, according to Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004), reading is one important way to improve the students' general language skills in English and help the students to think in English, enlarge the vocabulary, increase the reading speed, gain more knowledge,

and a good way to find out about new ideas, facts and experiences. Pretorius (2000) also claims that the teaching of reading is very important part of foreign language learning because it is one of the most important academic skills in teaching and learning process.

Based on the Curriculum 2013, the teaching of reading as a part of the English subject aims to help students comprehend the reading materials. However, reading comprehension in English is a challenging task for Indonesian students. The study done by Nurhafizah (2012) who involved the second grade students of SMPN 4 Malang showed that they had a problem in understanding the main idea of the texts and finding both implicit and explicit information. Another study in reading comprehension done by Shamaila (2010) has also identified some factors why the students got difficulties in reading comprehension; the factors were the students' lack of background knowledge, the selection of reading materials, the students' lack of reading quantity, the students' individual differences and the students' lack of motivation. Reading comprehension is also a challenge for seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 32 Palembang. Based on the results of the English reading test given by the writer on October $2^{nd}$ 2013, it was found that the students' mean score was 55, while the Minimum Passing Grade was 75. To help students improve their reading comprehension, it is arguable to say that the English teachers have an important role. For example, the teachers can use interesting reading materials. As Cameron (2001) says, "The teachers must take on the responsibility for adjusting tasks and topics so that they relate to the students interests" (p. 58). In Indonesia, the National Education Department (2003) also requires the teachers to use different kinds of texts, such as narratives, descriptive and expository texts, in their teaching to develop students' comprehension the reading text and communicative competence.

There are several ways to help students to improve their reading comprehension. One of the ways is by using interesting teaching materials. In this study, the writer wants to use English comic book series.

According to Csabay (2006), comics are authentic and using authentic material is very important in language teaching and learning. Comic book series is a book of comic strips or cartoons in series, often relating a sustained narrative. As Hornby (2002) describes, comic book series are a sequence of drawings arranged in interrelated panels to display brief humor of form a narrative, often serialized with text in balloons and captions.

According to Grant (2010), comic books have had motivating power in literacy development for children, especially young boys, since their introduction in the 1930. Krashen (2008) states that comic books and other "light" reading can be an important part of learning to read at an academic level. Krashen (2008) summarizes the previous research concludes that comic books contain a high number of unusual and academic vocabulary words that comic book readers tend to be better overall readers. Using comics can alleviate the negative view of reading for some students (McVicker, 2005). In addition, Liu (2004) states that comics are visual highly texts; they are effective especially for reading comprehension for second/additional language learners. In summary, comic books can hold the students' attention longer than blocks of print because the format is equal parts of pictures and texts.

The results of previous studies that used comic showed that the use of Comic Book could help teachers improve their students' learning of the English four language skills. For example, the study done by Prahasti (2008) who involved the eleventh grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Kayu Agung found that the use of comic strip had significant effect to the eleventh grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Kayuagung and the students were more active and interest in speaking skill. In addition, the results of the study conducted by Putri (2012) who involved the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 9 Palembang showed that using comics could improve speaking and writing skill of the students and make the students were interested and motivated.

In this study, the writer also used the English Comic Book Series to find out

whether or not they could help the students' improve their reading comprehension.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study was a Quasi-Experimental research method, especially pre-test and post-test control group design was applied. This study involved two variables: English Comic Book Series as the independent variable and Reading Comprehension of the Seventh Grade Students of SMP Negeri 32 Palembang was the dependent variable. This study involved two variables: English Comic Book Series as the independent variable and Reading Comprehension of the Seventh Grade Students of SMP Negeri 32 Palembang was the dependent variable. In this study, the writer taught reading to the seventh grade students in the experimental group by using English comic book. The teaching and learning process was held for 20 meetings, including the meeting for conducting the pre-test and the post-test.

The population of the study was all the seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 32 in the academic year 2013/2014. A purposive sampling was applied to select the sample, Two classes that had the same number of students and were taught by the same English teacher were chosen as the sample.

A reading test was used to collect the data. It was developed based on the aim of this study. It was also tried out to check its validity and reliability. The test was considered reliable since the Cronbach alpha was more than .70 (.97). t-test was applied to analyze the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
### Pre Test and Post Test Results

Based on the result of pre-test in the experimental group, the lowest score was 53, the highest score was 73, and the mean score was 63.7. The lowest score for pre-test of the control group was 53, the highest score was 73, and the mean score was 63.1. The result of post-test in the experimental group showed that the lowest score was 78, the highest score was 98, and the mean score was 85.9. While the post-test of control group was 62, the highest score was 92, and the mean score was 76.3.

The results of post-test of the experimental group and control group were also grouped based on the following categories: Excellent, Good, Average, Poor, and Failed. See in Table 1.

**Table 1**
**The Distribution Achievement of Post-test of the Experimental Group and Control Group (N=68)**

| Category | Score Interval | Mean /N | % | St. Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Excellent | 86-100 | 92.6 (26) | 38.3% | 3.534 |
| Good | 71-85 | 78.4 (34) | 50.0% | 3.145 |
| Average | 56-70 | 66.5 (8) | 11.7% | 3.071 |
| Poor | 41-55 | - | - | - |
| Failed | < 40 | - | - | - |
| Total | | 79.2 (68) | 100% | 3.25 |

As shown in Table 1, there were 26 students (38.3%) were in Excellent category. 34 students (50.0%) were in Good category, and 8 students (11.7%) were in Average category. There was no student in Poor category and Failed category.

The results of the distribution of the pre-test and post-test scores of experimental group and control group were also analyzed based on the KKM set by the school for the English subject. The result is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**
**The Score Distribution of Pre-test and Post-test of Experimental and Control Group**

| KKM | EXP. GROUP | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PRE | | POST | |
| | N | % | N | % |
| ≥75 | 0 | 0% | 34 | 100% |
| ≤75 | 34 | 100% | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 34 | 100% | 34 | 100% |
| | CONT. GROUP | | | |
| ≥75 | 0 | 0% | 23 | 67.7% |
| ≤75 | 34 | 100% | 13 | 38.3% |
| Total | 34 | 100% | 34 | 100% |

As shown in Table 2, no student got the score above the KKM in the pre-test of experimental group, but after the treatment, 34 students (100%) got the score above the KKM. While in the pre-test of control group, no student got the score above the KKM, but in the post test, there were 23 students got score above KKM. And there were 13 students got score below the KKM.

**Result of Paired Sample t-test**

The analysis of reading comprehension sub-skills, namely main idea, stated detail, unstated detail, inference, cause and effect, and vocabulary, were done by paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test. The summary of statistical analysis for reading comprehension sub-skills in presented in Table 3

**Table 3**
**Paired Sample t-test for**
**Experimental and Control Groups**

| Sub-skills | Paired Sample T-test | | | |
| | Exp. | | | |
| | Pre test | Post test | Mean Diff. | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RCA | 63.4 | 86.8 | 23.4 | .000 |
| Main Idea | 19.2 | 21.4 | 2.1 | .000 |
| Stated Detail | 18.5 | 21.1 | 2.5 | .000 |
| Unstated Detail | 7.1 | 10.2 | 3.1 | .000 |
| Inference | 7.7 | 12.1 | 4.3 | .000 |
| Cause & Effect | 5.2 | 10.5 | 5.3 | .000 |
| Vocabulary | 5.5 | 10.2 | 5.8 | .000 |
| Control | | | | |
| RCA | 66.1 | 79.1 | 12.0 | .002 |
| Main Idea | 18.6 | 20.1 | 2.2 | .001 |
| Stated Detail | 17.2 | 20.5 | 1.7 | .000 |
| Unstated Detail | 10.8 | 9.2 | 1.6 | .001 |
| Inference | 5.6 | 9.0 | 2.3 | .000 |
| Cause & Effect | 6.5 | 9.9 | 1.7 | .000 |
| Vocabulary | 7.0 | 7.0 | 2.2 | .000 |

The data shown on Table 3 reveals that there were significant differences between the results of the pre-test and post-test of the sub-skills in the experimental group and control group. This showed that there was significance difference in reading comprehension between the students who were taught by using English Comic book series and those students in the control group who were not taught by using English comic book series. Therefore, it can be concluded that the application of English Comic book series could improve the reading comprehension of the seventh grade students. The students who were taught by using English comic book had better reading comprehension scores than those students in the control group.

The analysis of independent sample t-test (Table 4) also showed that all the sub-skills of reading comprehension included in the reading test were significantly improved. The main purpose of reading is to get the main idea of the reading text. As Zwiers (2004) says, the purpose of reading is to construct meaning of the text, the students look at the letters, words, and sentences then they can understand and comprehend the reading text. Using English comic book could improve student' reading comprehension, especially it could help the students learn more vocabulary. According to Krashen (2008), comic books contain a high number of unusual and academic vocabulary words that comic book readers tend to be better overall readers. In addition, Csabay (2006) states that there are many advantages of comic for students in language classes, for instance; the students will get development for the vocabulary and the students will remember the expressions and grammatical forms easily.

**Table 4**
**Independent Sample t-test for**
**Experimental and Control Groups**

| Sub-skills | Independent Sample T-test | | | |
| | Post Test | Post Test | Mean | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|

|  | Cont. | Exp | Diff. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RCA | 79.1 | 86.8 | 7.7 | .000 |
| Main Idea | 20.1 | 21.4 | 1.3 | .000 |
| Stated Detail | 20.5 | 21.1 | 0.6 | .000 |
| Unstated Detail | 9.2 | 10.2 | 1.0 | .000 |
| Inference | 9.0 | 12.1 | 3.1 | .000 |
| Cause & Effect | 9.9 | 10.5 | 0.6 | .000 |
| Vocabulary | 7.0 | 10.2 | 3.2 | .000 |

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings and the interpretation of the study, it can be concluded the use of reading material in addition to what the students get from their text book is worth doing. As shown in this study, English Comic Book series was effective to improve reading comprehension of the seventh grade students. This was supported by the mean scores of the post-test in the experimental group and control group which was significantly different. The use English Comic Book also helped the students express their ideas and raise their interest in reading English.

Based on the results of this study, it was suggested that the teachers of English do not only expose their students with the reading materials found in the text book. This means that the English teachers are expected to be more creative so that they can figure out what they should do to help their students not only improve their English reading achievement, but also their interest in reading.

## REFERENCES

Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching language to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chair. (2003). *The impact of test content validity on language teaching and learning.* Dawadami Community College. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/1288628/The-impact-of-test-content-validity-on-language-teaching-and-learning.

Creswell, J.W. (2012). *Educational research planning conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston, MA:Pearson.

Csabay, N. (2006). Using comic strips in language classes. *English Teaching Forum,* 44(1), 24-26.

Ediger, M. (2001). *Sequencing student reading achievement*. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED456412.pdf.

Gallik, J.D. (1999). Do they read for pleasure? Recreational reading habits of students. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy,* 42 (6): 480-488.

Grant, M. (2010). *Developing boys' reading comprehension skills with interesting reading material,* no.2, 97.

Hornby, (2002). Comic book series. *English Teaching Forum,* 44(1), 28-29.

Krashen, B. (2008). *Developing power in reading*. Dubuque, IO: Hunt Publishing Company.

Liu, J. (2004). Effects of comic on L2 learners' reading comprehension. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(2), 225-243.

McVicker, C.J. (2007). Comic as a text structure for learning to read. *Reading Teacher*, 61, 85-88.

Mikulecky, B. S., & Jeffries, L. (2004). *More reading power (2nd ed)*. CA: California: Longman.

Nurhafizah, S (2012). *The reading problem of second grade students of SMPN 4 Malang.* Undergraduate Thesis, Malang University, Malang.

Pretorius, M. (2000). *The teaching of readingi foreign language.* Retrieved from http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/reading/goalsread.htm

Prahasti, R. (2008) *Teaching speaking skill to the eleventh grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Kayuagung by using comic strip*. Unpublished Thesis. Sriwijaya University, Palembang.

Putri, T. A. (2012). *Developing writing skill of the eight grade students of SMP Negeri 9 Palembang by Using Comic Strips*. Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis, Sriwijaya University, Palembang.

Ruddell, M. R. (2005). *Teaching content reading and writing*. (4th ed.). San fransisco, CA, California: Holt, Rinehart and Wiston.

Shamaila. (2010). *Barriers to reading comprehension*. Retrieved from http://www.experiencefestival.com/wp/article/barriers-to-reading-comprehension.

Zwiers, J. (2004). *Building Reading Comprehension Habits in Grades 6-12*. California

**About the Author**

Winda Apriani, S.Pd was the graduate of the English Education Study Program, Sriwijaya University; she completed his undergraduate study in 2014. She currently teaches English at one of the English course in Palembang.

Machdalena Vianty, M.Ed., M.Pd., Ed.D and Drs. Bambang A.L. are both the lecturers at the English Education Study Program, Sriwijaya University.

Illustrated English reading practice - free to download. Story and Comic Book about: Be Worthy of Trust. Helen sits in the living room of her small apartment. She looks for a job as a graphic designer in job ads online and in newspapers. She does this every day for months! One morning, as she sits in her living room as usual and looks for a job, her phone rings... One of the easiest ways to teach and learn English is through stories, and illustrated stories can be even better! Therefore, we at Really Learn English created this special comic book + exercises for you, completely free of charge. You can read it online, download the PDF file, print and use it by yourself or with your students, and check the answers using the answer key.