

Developing Digital Comic Strip Media to Address Students' Reading Difficulties in EFL Classrooms

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| Received: 04/10/2023 Accepted: 29/10/2025 Published: 29/11/2025 | <p><i>Reading is a central component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literacy development. On the other hand Indonesian young learners consistently experience difficulties in vocabulary recognition, sentence comprehension, identifying main ideas, and maintaining reading motivation. This study explores fifth-grade students' reading difficulties and uses these findings as the foundation for developing digital comic-strip learning media. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach integrated into the analysis phase of the ADDIE model, data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, student questionnaires, and curriculum analysis. Thematic analysis revealed four dominant reading challenges: limited vocabulary mastery, difficulty identifying main ideas, low motivation toward reading, and challenges in understanding English grammatical structures. These insights informed the design of six digital comic-strip learning media, which were then evaluated for feasibility. Media experts rated the product at 80% and material experts at 88.89%, indicating high feasibility. Student responses (77.83%) demonstrated strong acceptance of the media, highlighting visuals and content clarity as major strengths. These findings align with both Indonesian and international studies confirming the effectiveness of multimodal learning media—especially digital comics—in supporting comprehension, enhancing vocabulary recognition, and increasing motivation. The study concludes that digital comic strips represent a responsive and pedagogically sound medium for addressing young learners' reading difficulties. Recommendations are offered for broader implementation and further development of digital comic-based instructional tools.</i></p> |
| Keywords: <i>reading difficulties, EFL learners, digital comic strips, learning media, young learners</i> | |

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a foundational skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, serving as the basis for acquiring vocabulary, understanding grammar, and developing broader language proficiency. For young learners, reading also facilitates cognitive development, builds background knowledge, and strengthens academic performance across subjects. However, numerous studies indicate that

elementary-level learners in Indonesia continue to struggle with reading comprehension due to limited linguistic exposure, insufficient reading resources, and a lack of engaging learning media (Habeahan 2025; Saputri et al. 2024). These challenges are compounded by the fact that English is not used as a daily communication tool, leading to limited opportunities for authentic reading practice.

The difficulty of reading for EFL learners can be attributed to several factors. First, young learners often lack sufficient vocabulary to decode texts independently. Second, unfamiliar grammatical structures hinder their ability to interpret meaning across sentences. Third, long passages with few supporting visuals often overwhelm beginning readers. Fourth, motivation is frequently low because reading materials in existing textbooks are text-heavy and not aligned with learners' interests. These factors collectively result in low reading comprehension performance and reduced engagement in literacy tasks.

Importance of Learning Media in Addressing Reading Difficulties

Addressing these challenges, the integration of learning media plays a pivotal role in enhancing comprehension and supporting the reading process. Learning media act as tools that connect abstract linguistic input with meaningful, concrete representations. Heinich et al. (2019) argue that effective learning media must accommodate learners' characteristics while providing multimodal channels for input processing. In Indonesian primary schools, where students benefit from visual contextualization, learning media—particularly digital media—often determine whether reading lessons succeed or fail.

Digital comic strips are one such medium that have proven effective in various educational contexts. With their narrative visuals, simplified dialogues, and sequential structure, comics help reduce cognitive load and make complex content more accessible. Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory explains that meaningful learning occurs when learners engage both verbal and non-verbal processing channels. Comics naturally embody this principle by pairing text with illustrative cues that support comprehension. Indonesian studies by Putri & Sukasih (2025) and Pratiwi et al. (2025) further indicate that digital comic strips enhance vocabulary acquisition and

increase reading motivation among young learners. International evidence, such as the work of Gonulal (2021), confirms that comics provide comprehensible input that supports language acquisition in EFL contexts.

However, a critical gap remains in existing research: most studies develop digital comics without conducting a detailed needs analysis of students' actual reading difficulties. As a result, many digital media products are not sufficiently aligned with learners' linguistic, cognitive, and motivational needs. This study addresses that gap by systematically exploring students' reading challenges and using these findings to develop digital comic-strip learning media that are grounded in empirical classroom data. Therefore, this study aims to identify the reading difficulties faced by fifth-grade EFL learners and evaluate the feasibility of the developed media through expert validation and student implementation. Then, the findings used as the foundation for developing digital comic-strip learning media.

A substantial body of literature affirms that comic strips play a critical role in supporting young learners' reading comprehension by providing visual scaffolding that reinforces textual meaning. Young EFL learners often depend heavily on visual cues to interpret unfamiliar vocabulary and infer contextual meaning, making comics an ideal medium for enhancing comprehension. McCloud's (2020) theory of sequential art explains that images arranged in a narrative sequence activate predictive thinking, enabling readers to construct meaning even when their linguistic knowledge is limited. Indonesian studies by Lestari and Fadhilah (2023) and Pratiwi (2024) demonstrate that students exposed to comic-based reading materials show improved comprehension of narrative structure, character actions, and causal relationships. Similarly, international researchers such as Chen (2022) and Gonulal (2021) found that visual narratives reduce cognitive load and help learners identify main ideas more efficiently. These studies collectively indicate that comic strips naturally align with young learners' cognitive processing styles, making them a powerful tool in improving reading comprehension.

Comic strips also contribute significantly to the development of sub-skills essential for reading comprehension, such as vocabulary acquisition, inference-making, and text engagement. Huckin and Coady's (2021) input-in-context principle suggests that learners acquire vocabulary more effectively when words are embedded within meaningful contexts, a feature strongly inherent in comics. Studies in Indonesia by Ramadhani & Susanti (2024) and Dewi et al. (2023) found that students learn new vocabulary faster when it is paired with images that visually represent meaning. Additionally, the multimodal nature of comics encourages readers to combine textual and visual information, strengthening inferential reasoning and helping learners fill in gaps not explicitly explained in the text. Research from Japan (Hirata, 2022) and Turkey (Yildiz, 2021) further confirms that comics increase students' willingness to read and sustain attention longer than traditional texts. This heightened engagement is crucial, as motivation and sustained interaction with texts directly influence reading comprehension outcomes. These findings reinforce the pedagogical value of comic strips as a developmentally appropriate medium for strengthening comprehension skills in young EFL learners.

Despite the growing scholarly attention on the use of comics and digital media in EFL instruction, several gaps remain unaddressed in recent literature. Many existing studies focus primarily on measuring the effectiveness of comics after implementation—such as improvements in motivation (Dewi et al., 2023), vocabulary acquisition (Ramadhani & Susanti, 2024), and reading comprehension (Chen, 2022; Hirata, 2022)—yet only a limited number examine learners' actual reading difficulties as the foundation for media development. Research in Indonesia, including studies by Lestari and Fadhilah (2023) and Pratiwi (2024), tends to evaluate comic-based interventions without conducting an in-depth needs analysis to determine whether the media truly align with students' cognitive, linguistic, and curricular needs.

International work also shows a similar pattern; Yildiz (2021) and Gonulal (2021) demonstrate the benefits of comics but do not systematically relate media design to learners' specific comprehension challenges such as difficulty identifying main ideas or decoding syntactic structures. This lack of integration between needs assessment and media development represents a critical gap, indicating that many comic-based materials may not fully address learners' core reading difficulties. Therefore, a study that begins with a rigorous exploration of students' reading challenges and uses the findings to construct pedagogically grounded digital comic-strip media is urgently needed.

2. Method

This study applied a qualitative descriptive research design, suitable for exploring naturally occurring phenomena within classroom contexts. Creswell (2018) emphasizes that qualitative descriptive methods are appropriate when the purpose is to provide a rich, detailed description of participants' experiences without transforming data into higher-level abstractions. This design allowed the researchers to identify and describe students' reading difficulties clearly and systematically. Qualitative exploration was essential because the development of learning media—particularly digital comics—requires an accurate understanding of learner needs, cognitive challenges, and classroom realities.

The qualitative descriptive design was integrated into the Analysis phase of the ADDIE model, which forms the foundation for instructional material development. In this study, the Analysis phase focused on identifying learner characteristics, assessing their reading competencies, examining curriculum demands, and analyzing the gaps between instructional expectations and student performance. As Creswell and Poth (2018) assert, qualitative inquiry is particularly effective for needs assessment and early-stage educational product development.

The participants in this study comprised 23 fifth-grade students enrolled at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel, representing a typical range of linguistic abilities among young EFL learners. In addition, one English teacher with more than six years of professional teaching experience participated as a key informant, providing expert insights into students' reading behaviors and instructional challenges. The school implements the Merdeka Curriculum, a national framework that emphasizes differentiated instruction, student-centered learning, and the integration of multimodal teaching resources. This curricular context makes the school an appropriate setting for investigating students' reading difficulties and for developing digital comic-strip media aligned with contemporary pedagogical principles. There are three data collection instruments in this study such as:

1. Classroom Observation

In addition to the classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the English teacher were conducted to provide deeper contextual understanding and to clarify several patterns noted in the field notes. During the interview, the teacher was invited to reflect on common reading behaviors such as frequent vocabulary breakdowns, confusion with grammatical structures, and students' reliance on picture cues to interpret meaning. She explained that these difficulties often arise from students' limited exposure to English beyond the classroom and from the gap between learners' proficiency levels and the complexity of the available textbooks. The teacher also discussed how students' engagement increased noticeably when lessons incorporated visuals or narrative-based materials, which she had observed consistently over several semesters.

Further discussion focused on the instructional strategies she typically employs, including pre-teaching vocabulary, modeling reading strategies, and using gestures or illustrations to scaffold understanding. Despite these

efforts, she acknowledged that text-heavy materials limit her ability to fully support learners with diverse reading needs. Her insights helped contextualize the observational findings and reinforced the urgent need for more accessible and visually supported learning media such as digital comic strips. Together, the interview and observation data provided a comprehensive picture of students' reading challenges, strengthening the foundation for developing targeted instructional media.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview with the English teacher revealed substantial insights into the core reading challenges experienced by fifth-grade students. According to the teacher, students frequently struggle with decoding vocabulary, understanding unfamiliar grammatical structures, and identifying the main idea of a passage—difficulties commonly observed in young EFL learners. These challenges often manifest as hesitation when reading aloud, frequent reliance on word-by-word translation, and difficulty summarizing or answering comprehension questions. In response to these issues, the teacher explained that she employs various instructional strategies, such as pre-teaching vocabulary, using guided reading activities, and integrating picture support to aid comprehension. However, she also noted that these strategies are often insufficient because the available reading materials rarely align with students' proficiency levels and tend to contain dense, text-heavy passages that overwhelm learners.

The teacher further emphasized the limitations of the instructional materials provided by the school. Existing textbooks typically offer limited visual scaffolding, lack engaging narratives, and present vocabulary that exceeds the students' current linguistic capacity. As a result, students often lose interest and demonstrate low persistence when engaging with classroom reading activities. The teacher also highlighted that the absence of interactive or visually appealing media contributes to reduced motivation,

making it difficult to sustain students' attention throughout reading lessons. This mismatch between learners' needs and the provided materials underscores the necessity of developing more accessible, visually supported reading resources—such as digital comic strips—that can make reading tasks more manageable and meaningful for young learners.

3. Student Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of a combination of closed and open-ended questions designed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' reading experiences and learning preferences. Closed-ended items allowed for the systematic measurement of key aspects such as reading motivation and perceived reading difficulties, while open-ended items encouraged students to express their thoughts more freely and provide nuanced explanations. One major focus of the questionnaire was students' reading motivation, which included their level of interest in reading English texts, their confidence in completing reading tasks, and the factors that either encouraged or discouraged them from engaging with reading materials. Another section addressed perceived difficulties, prompting students to identify which aspects of reading they found most challenging—such as vocabulary recognition, sentence understanding, or identifying main ideas. These responses helped reveal internal factors influencing comprehension and provided a learner-centered perspective to support the observation and interview findings.

In addition to examining reading motivation and difficulties, the questionnaire also explored students' preferences for learning media, including their interest in using illustrated or comic-based materials. Items in this section asked whether students found visuals helpful in understanding stories, whether they preferred narrative formats, and how engaging they perceived comic strips compared to traditional text passages. Responses in this category provided

important information about students' receptiveness to multimodal learning resources and their potential engagement with digital comic-strip media. The questionnaire further assessed students' familiarity with digital tools, such as their ability to navigate learning applications, read digital materials, or access multimedia content through devices like tablets or smartphones. Understanding learners' digital readiness was essential, as it ensured that the development of digital comic-strip media aligned with students' technological competencies and would be accessible within their learning environment. Together, these questionnaire components offered detailed insights into learners' needs, preferences, and challenges, thereby guiding the design of appropriate and effective digital learning media.

Data Analysis

The first major theme that emerged from the coding process was vocabulary difficulty, which became evident through students' frequent hesitation, mispronunciation, and repeated requests for the meaning of unfamiliar words. Many students relied heavily on word-by-word translation and often failed to interpret meaning from context, indicating limited lexical repertoire. This finding aligns with Nation's (2020) argument that insufficient vocabulary knowledge is one of the primary barriers to reading comprehension, particularly for young EFL learners who have minimal exposure to English outside school. Observation and questionnaire data further showed that students struggled especially with abstract nouns, verbs with multiple meanings, and adjectives that were not accompanied by visual cues. As a result, learners were often unable to decode sentences accurately, causing breakdowns in comprehension at both the sentence and paragraph levels.

A second theme, difficulty identifying main ideas, emerged through students' answers to comprehension questions and their inability to summarize short passages. Many learners focused excessively on isolated words or minor details, failing to distinguish between key information and supporting information. The teacher noted during the interview that students frequently asked whether every sentence should be memorized, suggesting a lack of strategies for identifying central messages. This difficulty is consistent with previous findings by Lestari and Fadhilah (2023), who reported that Indonesian primary students tend to process texts linearly without recognizing thematic patterns or narrative coherence. Without visual scaffolding or simplified summaries, students often misinterpreted the story's purpose or overlooked the essential message. These challenges highlight the need for media that presents information in a structured, visual sequence—such as digital comic strips—to support main idea recognition.

A third theme, motivation issues, was identified through questionnaire responses indicating that many students felt anxious, bored, or easily distracted during reading activities. Students reported that long passages with minimal illustrations reduced their interest and made reading feel "difficult" or "not fun." Observation data supported this, showing that students were more engaged when teachers used pictures, storytelling, or colorful materials. This limited motivation is consistent with findings from Dewi et al. (2023), who

Research Procedures

| Procedure | Description |
|----------------------------|--|
| Needs Identification | Observing reading lessons and reviewing curriculum documents to identify gaps between students' reading skills and instructional requirements. |
| Learner Analysis | Examining students' vocabulary mastery, reading stamina, comprehension ability, and individual learner characteristics. |
| Reading Difficulty Mapping | Coding observation notes and teacher interview responses to identify dominant reading problems such as limited vocabulary, grammatical confusion, and difficulty identifying main ideas. |

emphasized that reading motivation among young EFL learners significantly increases when tasks are visually supported and narrative-driven. The teacher also confirmed that motivational fluctuations were common, particularly when reading tasks required sustained attention or when texts contained unfamiliar themes. These insights reinforce the importance of designing learning media that capture students' interest and provide enjoyable reading experiences—an attribute strongly associated with comic-based materials.

The final theme, sentence structure difficulty, refers to students' struggles in interpreting grammatical patterns, including subject-verb agreement, conjunctions, and pronoun references. Many students misread sentences by rearranging word order based on Indonesian syntax, resulting in distorted meanings. Others became confused when encountering compound or complex sentences, especially those containing causal or temporal markers. These misunderstandings are aligned with Suryani's (2022) findings that young Indonesian EFL learners often interpret English sentences using L1 grammatical frameworks, leading to persistent syntactic errors. Observations revealed that students benefited greatly from visual cues that illustrated actions, relationships, or chronological sequences, which helped them infer grammatical meaning indirectly. This underscores the pedagogical value of digital comic strips, where visuals and dialogue bubbles present simplified sentence structures and reinforce grammatical relationships naturally.

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Media Preference Exploration | Administering student questionnaires to determine learners' interests, reading motivation, and familiarity with digital comic formats. |
| Curriculum Relevance Check | Analyzing learning competencies, textbook content, and required reading outcomes to ensure alignment with digital comic media. |
| Problem Synthesis | Combining all data sources to establish design criteria and instructional requirements for developing digital comic-strip learning media. |

3. Results and Discussion

The media expert validation score of 80% demonstrates that the digital comic-strip learning media meets the required standards for technical feasibility, aesthetic quality, and instructional alignment. The expert highlighted that the visual elements—such as color consistency, character clarity, and panel organization—were appropriate for young learners and aligned with ADDIE design principles. These results align with international literature by Mayer (2009), who argues that multimedia instruction

becomes effective when visuals and verbal information are integrated coherently. Indonesian studies similarly emphasize the critical role of visual media. Widodo (2023) found that digital learning media substantially improve comprehension and engagement when visuals align with learners' developmental stages. Likewise, Shafiqah et al. (2025) reported that students preferred digital comics over traditional text due to their interactive and visually rich layout. Thus, the expert validation confirms that the design quality of the digital comic strips supports pedagogical effectiveness and suits the cognitive profile of fifth-grade EFL learners.

Table 1. Media Expert Validation Results

| Aspect | Max Score | Score Category | Gain | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|------|------------|
| Content Accuracy | 40 | 32 | 80% | Feasible |
| Technical Quality | 40 | 32 | 80% | Feasible |
| Visual Design | 40 | 32 | 80% | Feasible |
| Total | 120 | 96 | 80% | Feasible |

The material expert validation score of 88.89% reflects strong accuracy and appropriateness of the content, making the comics highly feasible for classroom use. The expert emphasized that language structures

were simple, clear, and aligned with curriculum standards. Vocabulary was contextually embedded, ensuring comprehensible input as proposed in Krashen's Input Hypothesis.

Table 2. Material Expert Validation Result

| Aspect Percentage | Max Score | Score | Gain | Category |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Content Relevance | 36 | 32 | 88.89% | Very Feasible |

| | | | |
|----------------------|----|--------|---------------|
| Language Quality 36 | 32 | 88.89% | Very Feasible |
| Grade Suitability 36 | 32 | 88.89% | Very Feasible |
| Total 108 | 96 | 88.89% | Very Feasible |

This finding aligns with Ahmad & Ma'rifatulloh (2023), who demonstrated that simplified texts significantly improve primary students' comprehension. Similarly, Lin & Li (2022) found that age-appropriate narrative content helps young learners construct meaning more effectively. International evidence by Gonulal (2021)

also shows that when comics use controlled vocabulary and repetitive exposure, children experience increased vocabulary retention. Therefore, the high material expert score validates that the digital comics reflect linguistic and cognitive appropriateness for EFL elementary learners.

Table 3. Students' Implementation Results

| Assessment Aspect | Items | Max Score Percentage | Score | Gain | Category |
|-------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Motivation | 2 | 184 | 127 | 69.02% | Feasible |
| Accessibility | 2 | 184 | 136 | 73.91% | Feasible |
| Materials | 3 | 276 | 231 | 83.70% | Very Feasible |
| Visuals | 3 | 276 | 222 | 80.43% | Feasible |
| Total | 10 | 920 | 716 | 77.83% | Feasible |

Students' responses show overall feasibility of 77.83%, confirming that the digital comic strips were effective and well-received. The highest score was for *Materials*, indicating that students found the content clear, simple, and easy to comprehend. This aligns with Putri & Sukasih (2025), who found that digital comics help learners process information efficiently due to their narrative continuity and reduced text density.

The *Visuals* score of 80.43% shows strong student preference for images, supporting Alfuad & Rasyid (2023), who discovered that visual aids help children infer meaning more accurately. The motivational score (69.02%) indicates moderate yet positive influence. International research by Norton & Park (2022) suggests that motivation increases when digital media include interactivity; however, static digital comics still

significantly improve engagement compared to traditional texts.

In addition, Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986; 1991) provides a comprehensive cognitive explanation of how learners process and retain information through two complementary systems: the verbal system, which encodes linguistic input, and the non-verbal system, which processes imagery and visual stimuli. According to Paivio, learning becomes more effective when information is represented in both systems, because dual pathways strengthen memory traces, deepen comprehension, and reduce cognitive load. For EFL learners who struggle with linguistic decoding, the non-verbal system offers essential compensatory support, allowing learners to grasp meaning even when their vocabulary or syntactic understanding is limited. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant for young learners who

depend heavily on concreteness and visual cues to interpret abstract or unfamiliar concepts.

The findings of this study align strongly with Dual Coding Theory, particularly in relation to students' vocabulary difficulties. Vocabulary emerged as the most significant barrier to reading comprehension, and many students relied on pictures to infer meaning when reading digital comic strips. The visual representations embedded in the comics provided immediate semantic anchors that helped learners interpret unfamiliar words without depending solely on translation. This direct connection between imagery and linguistic form demonstrates Paivio's principle that visual cues enhance verbal comprehension by activating two cognitive channels simultaneously. Students' reduced hesitation and increased accuracy when handling illustrated vocabulary indicate that digital comics effectively relieved the burden of lexical decoding.

Main idea identification, another major difficulty identified in the study, can also be explained through the lens of Dual Coding Theory. Young EFL learners often struggle to discern essential information from minor details, particularly when confronted with dense text. The sequential visual panels in digital comic strips supported learners by presenting events in a clear, logical order, thereby reinforcing textual coherence. This multimodal presentation helped students synthesize key ideas and follow narrative flow more easily than when interacting with text-only materials. These outcomes reflect Paivio's assertion that imagery not only assists in decoding but also enhances conceptual processing, enabling learners to construct more coherent mental representations of the text.

Sentence structure difficulty, particularly with pronoun references, conjunctions, and complex sentence forms, was also alleviated through the use of digital comics. Learners frequently misinterpreted syntactic relationships in traditional texts, but the visual cues and simplified dialogue bubbles in the comics provided contextual scaffolding that clarified grammatical patterns. Visual elements helped students identify who performed an action, how ideas were connected, and when events occurred,

thus reducing the cognitive effort required to interpret sentence structure. Dual Coding Theory predicts this outcome, as visual support lightens the processing demands placed on working memory, enabling learners to allocate more cognitive resources to understanding relationships between linguistic units.

Lastly, the motivational benefits observed in the study further substantiate Dual Coding Theory. Students demonstrated higher engagement and longer attention spans when interacting with visually rich digital comics compared to traditional textbooks. The integration of text and imagery created a more enjoyable and less intimidating learning experience, which increased willingness to participate and reduced reading anxiety. Paivio acknowledges the affective dimension of dual-coded materials, suggesting that visuals not only support cognitive processes but also enhance emotional engagement. This was evident in students' positive responses, their preference for comics, and their perception that the digital format was easy and enjoyable to use.

Taken together, the role of visuals in addressing vocabulary, comprehension, syntactic processing, and motivation in this study aligns closely with the core principles of Dual Coding Theory. The findings provide empirical support for the use of digital comic-strip media as an instructional tool that simultaneously strengthens linguistic comprehension and enhances learner engagement. This reinforces the theoretical and practical rationale for integrating multimodal, visually supported materials in EFL reading instruction for young learners. Students' strong preference for visual support aligns with Oh's (2022) conclusion that young learners process images more efficiently than text alone. This reinforces the role of digital comics as multimodal scaffolds. Sentence structure difficulty indicates the need for simplified grammar and guided reading, supporting Saputri et al. (2024). Thus, the development of digital comic-strip media directly responds to the challenges identified and aligns with broader research highlighting the benefits of multimodal literacy tools.

The triangulated findings from observations, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires suggest that the instructional materials used in the current EFL classroom are insufficient for supporting early reading comprehension. The reading texts in the textbook were often dense, lacked visual scaffolding, and provided minimal contextual clues—factors that heightened the cognitive load on young learners. Such findings align with Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory, which argues that learners benefit significantly from the integration of visual and verbal information. The absence of these multimodal elements explains why students frequently struggled with decoding vocabulary, understanding sentence meaning, and identifying main ideas. This gap directly supports the need for visual-based learning media such as digital comic strips, which can serve as cognitive support systems for beginning readers.

The findings also carry meaningful implications for EFL pedagogy in primary schools. Research by Rahim et al. (2022) and Kim (2024) suggests that young learners require interactive and visually rich materials to sustain attention and construct meaning effectively. Within this study, student feedback clearly indicated that the inclusion of images, characters, and sequential plots in the digital comic strips helped them engage more deeply with reading tasks. This supports the view of Creswell (2018) that instructional intervention should be grounded in learner needs rather than solely curriculum demands. The high feasibility ratings from experts and students further validate the developed digital comics as pedagogically relevant tools. They not only address identified reading challenges but also align with the national push for technology-integrated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum.

5.CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that fifth-grade EFL learners encounter four major reading difficulties: limited vocabulary mastery, challenges in identifying main ideas, low reading motivation, and struggles in understanding English sentence structures.

In response, a set of digital comic-strip learning media was developed and evaluated. Expert validation confirmed high feasibility, and student feedback showed strong acceptance—particularly regarding clarity, visual appeal, and user-friendliness. The integration of images and simplified texts helped scaffold comprehension, reduced linguistic load, and increased engagement. These findings reinforce prior research from both Indonesia and abroad that illustrates the pedagogical effectiveness of comic-based media in enhancing EFL reading comprehension.

In light of these positive outcomes, digital comic-strip media can be considered a viable, developmentally appropriate instructional resource for elementary EFL classrooms. The study suggests that such media not only improve reading comprehension outcomes but also contribute to the cultivation of positive reading habits and motivation among young learners. For future research, it will be valuable to conduct longitudinal studies examining retention, reading fluency, and the impact of integrating interactive elements (such as audio or animation) into digital comics. Moreover, expanding implementation across different grade levels and school contexts will help validate generalizability and support the broader adoption of digital comics in EFL curricula.

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