

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Reading is one of the essential skills that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students must master. In the classroom, students encounter various types of texts, including learning materials, exam instructions, and test questions. Additionally, EFL students need to comprehend academic texts to support their studies, such as reference books, academic articles, and other English-language texts. Good reading skills enable students to better understand texts relevant to their field of study (Erya & Pustika, 2021).

A student is considered to have good reading skills when they can comprehend and interpret the text they read. This ability, known as reading comprehension, refers to understanding written content. Readers should be able to read comprehension to convey what the writer meant (Mogea, 2023). However, reading comprehension skills cannot be obtained in a short time. Students need to practice a lot. Hence, increasing reading activities can be one step toward developing reading comprehension.

Unfortunately, the reading habits of students in Indonesia remain low. According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey results published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2022, Indonesia ranks 68 out of 81 participating countries in reading literacy. Indonesia's reading score was 359, significantly below the average score of 476, with a gap of 184 points from Singapore, which ranks the highest with a score of 543. This means that Indonesia is one of the

countries with a very low reading level. Several factors contribute to this low reading engagement, including lack of motivation and perceived boredom (Diana & Markhamah, 2023). Furthermore, Robbani & Khoirotunnisa (2021) argue that long words in reading materials such as textbooks, magazines, and e-books make them uninteresting. Therefore, choosing engaging reading materials is necessary to make reading more pleasurable so that reading habits can increase. One effective way is by using extensive reading (ER) material.

ER material allows students to engage with text in enjoyable ways. Through extensive reading, students can select reading materials that align with their interests. According to Haswani et al. (2024), ER can enhance students' reading fluency, support vocabulary development, and increase overall motivation to read. Thus, ER can help students to increase reading activity, which in turn will help them to improve their comprehension skills. Various types can be utilized as ER material. One of which is Digital Comics.

Digital comics have become a popular reading material that can support students' reading skills (Sorohiti & Kirsan, 2023). As a form of extensive reading material, digital comics allow students to select content they enjoy, fostering intrinsic motivation to read. Additionally, digital comics, by combining text and images, make it easier for students to understand the storyline (Sorohiti & Kirsan, 2023). Digital comics are also easily accessible because they are available on various websites and applications. Many of them can be read for free. Thus, students can read them anywhere and anytime.

Engaging with digital comics not only gives an enjoyable reading experience but also increases students' engagement with the text. When reading,

students may experience various difficulties. Ristian (2023) found that limited vocabulary is a challenge for students when reading. For this reason, students need to use certain strategies to overcome the challenges they experience. Thus, examining how students engage with digital comics and the strategies they use can provide valuable insights into their reading behavior and learning development.

Several studies have proven the benefits of using digital comics in developing reading skills. According to research conducted by Permatasari (2023), digital comics have become a medium that can increase motivation in reading. The students said their reading speed had improved, and they read more fluently. In addition, Robbani & Khoirotunnisa (2021) discovered that reading digital comics enhances grammar and vocabulary acquisition while also building critical thinking skills. Furthermore, Raharja (2023) reported that digital comics help students develop word recognition abilities.

At Jambi University, where this study will be conducted, Hidayah (2023) explored students' perceptions of digital comics in vocabulary learning. However, this research does not analyze how students engage with digital comics for reading comprehension. Besides that, Ristian (2023) investigated how students use manga comics in ER, identifying reading strategies and challenges. While this research provides great insights, it only focuses on manga comics, whereas digital comics cover a wider range of formats. Moreover, Yanto & Umah (2023) investigated engagement in reading digital comics strips from vocational school students. Thus, there is a gap in research regarding the use of digital comics as an

aid tool for enhancing reading comprehension among EFL students at Jambi University.

Due to the limited research, this study aims to explore students' experiences in using digital comics as a tool for reading comprehension, by exploring how they engage with digital comics and identify the reading strategies they use to help their reading comprehension.

1.2 Research Questions

Referring to the Background of the study, the researcher formulates the Research Questions as follows:

1. How do EFL students engage with digital comics to support their reading comprehension?
2. What reading strategies do the students use when reading digital comics?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

Based on the existing problems, the researcher conducted this study with the aims:

1. Explore how EFL students engage with digital comics to support their reading comprehension.
2. Identify the reading strategies students used when reading digital comics.

1.4 Limitations of the Research

This study focuses on students' experiences using digital comics to help them improve their reading comprehension. This involves exploring how EFL students engage with digital comics and identifying the reading strategies they use. The research only focuses on the use of digital comics and does not examine other digital reading materials. The data have been collected through semi-

structured interviews. It means that the results are based on participants' responses and are not generalized to all EFL students.

1.5 The Significance of the Research

The results of this study are expected to help students, teachers, and future research.

1. For students

This study explores students' experiences in using digital comics to help reading comprehension. By understanding how digital comics support engagement and reading strategies, students can maximize their potential in utilizing digital comics to improve their reading skills effectively.

2. For educators

This study provides empirical evidence about how digital comics can be effective reading material for EFL students. It also helps educators understand how digital media can meet the learning needs and interests of students. Furthermore, educators can consider using digital comics as learning media in the classroom.

3. For future research

The findings from this study can serve as a foundation for further exploration of the use of digital comics in EFL students' reading comprehension. This research can help future researchers and encourage exploration of other aspects of digital comics.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Several definitions are provided to assist readers in comprehending and establishing their own opinions, as well as avoiding misunderstandings.

1. EFL Students

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) refers to students whose first language is not English. EFL students are in countries where English is not spoken in everyday life. In this study, EFL students refer to the third and fourth-year students in the English Education Study Program at Jambi University who use digital comics as a reading source beyond the classroom.

2. Digital Comics

Digital comics are comics that are created or released digitally rather than in printed form. They can be read through apps or websites (webcomics). In this case, digital comics can be read by students anywhere at any time through their smartphones.

3. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to students' ability to understand what they read. This process involves understanding the meaning and integrating it with existing knowledge so that students can construct a coherent visual representation of the text they read. In this study, reading comprehension refers to how students comprehend and process information from digital comics.

4. Engagement

Engagement focuses on the way students interact with digital comics. This study examined three dimensions according to Fredricks et al. (2024): behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement.

5. Reading Strategies

Reading strategies refer to the techniques that readers employ to enhance their comprehension of a text. In this study, reading strategies specifically refer to the methods used by EFL students while reading digital comics to aid their reading comprehension.