

EFL Education Journal

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The Effect of Comics on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Students' Reading Comprehension at *SMPN 1* *Bangsalsari Junior High School*

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Abstract: This research was aimed to investigate the effect of using comics on EFL students' reading comprehension achievement of Junior High School. The participants of the research were taken by using cluster random sampling. The data collection methods of the research were the reading comprehension post test and documentation. The try out test was administered before conducting the post test to establish the reliability coefficient of the test, the test validity, and the difficulty index of test items. The result of the data analysis showed that the experimental group performed better than the control group. It also showed that the students thinking skill in comprehending the content of the story was aided by the comics. Compared to the control class, the students in experimental class showed their interest and willingness to read the comics. In other words, comics become motivational & educational tool in the class.

Keywords: Comics, Reading comprehension achievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this technology era, people do reading everyday as when they check their e-mail, messages, or read online news everyday. Furthermore, this habitual activity becomes their need. As a result, in the wider meaning, texting, chatting, or browsing on internet cannot be avoided anymore. Another involvement of reading in daily life are reading newspapers, maps, directions, user's manual, prescription, job vacancy, and etc. In other words, there is involvement of reading in people's daily activities, either in context of technology, medication, education, and other contexts.

In the context of education, there are 4 basic skills which must be mastered, one of them is reading which is the most important skill among those skills. The basic reason is that reading is used in every learning process. The idea is in line as Hallman's statement in Stone (2009:43) which states that reading is fundamental aim which must be mastered to succeed both in school and in life. Thus, due to the importance of reading ability, it is a must for the teacher to make their students able to read in purpose.

In teaching learning process, to make students able to comprehend the text is not an easy action. To overcome this situation, it is essential for the teacher to monitor the learning progress in order to determine what students' needs are in building their skill, such as appropriate reading material. In other hands, visual aid obviously plays important role in teaching learning process, especially in teaching reading comprehension. Cowen (1984) states that visual media can make concepts more accessible to students and enhance literal recall of information. This statement explains that visual media become necessary component in every teaching and learning process because it helps to find any information when needed.

Comics is regarded as visual medium. It provides picture in sequences and text in form of conversation. Because of this uniqueness, comics are able to help students in getting information easier than asking students to read a text only. Sones (1944) agrees that picture can tell a story more effectively than words. Combined with pictures, comprehending process will be less difficult to do. Therefore, words in comics can be as verbal guidelines and pictures can be as graphic assistance for the students to guess the meaning of the difficult or unfamiliar words and to comprehend the text. So, based on the statement explained before, the researcher

intended to use comics as learning material in investigating its effect on students' reading comprehension outcomes.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Theoretical Framework*

Reading is a process where the writers transfer their ideas to the readers through written medium. According to NCTE (2004), reading is a complex and purposeful sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic process in which readers simultaneously use their background knowledge related to the topic to construct the meaning of the text.

Grabe (2004:50) states that readers comprehend texts better when the texts are familiar or when they are related to well-developed disciplinary knowledge of a reader. Further, Saito et al (1999) stated that there are two aspects which interfere the process of reading the text: (a) unfamiliar scripts and writing systems and (b) unfamiliar cultural. Thus, background knowledge and the richness of vocabularies are essential in comprehension process

Generally, as stated by Hennings (1997 :269) reading comprehension is divided into 4 parts of comprehension, they are words comprehension, sentence comprehension, paragraph comprehension, and text comprehension. Word comprehension is more likely as knowing the vocabulary and sentence vocabulary is likely as knowing the meaning of the sentence, either literally or inferentially. Paragraph comprehension is defined as knowing the writer idea in each paragraph while text comprehension is understanding the whole text as one unity, covering the information, lesson or knowledge.

In comprehension process, Liu (2004:227) states that the combination of visual and scribal provides a wider and more specific account of meaning, coherence, and

inference effects to help students create alternative strategies. Relating to this statement, it can be said reading comprehension was influenced by the readers' background knowledge while visual aids helping them in comprehending process. Relating to this research, the researcher intended to investigate the effect of comics toward students' reading comprehension outcomes.

Comics is defined as a magazine, especially for children, with stories told in picture. Further, McCloud (1993:8) stated that comics is a juxtaposed sequential visual art. In other words, comics is an images-provided story visualized in chronological order.

They are 2 categories of elements of comics stated by Zeeders (2010). They are Graphical terms and abstract terms. Graphical terms cover icon, panel, background, border, text, speech balloon/ words ballon, sound effect (SFX), narrartive text, motion line, symbolia, character, object, and text character. On the other hand, Abstract terms cover closure, gutter, panel-to-panel transition, comic, scene, and invisible ideas

According to Smith (2006), there are 5 types of comics, they are comic strips, comic books, trade-paper back, graphic novel, and web comics. The researcher chose comic books as the research interest in this research because comic books has longer story than comic strips, but less complex story than graphic novel. In addition, comic books frequently require the reader to have knowledge of past issues, which means that they are related to the readers' background knowledge.

2.2. Conceptual Review

In this research, comics was used as the reading material in implementing the treatment to the experimental group. The role of comics in the classroom gives big influences, both as readings and as literature. Berkowitz and Parker (2001:13) say that comic books can be used with adults and children in variety of teaching and

training settings as motivational and educational tools. Further, they give some guidelines when selecting comics as reading material for students. They are: avoid comic art with nudity, inappropriate language, swearing, graphic/gory violence, offensive portrayals of principal, teachers, or other groups, and it should contain proper context.

In addition, Cary (2004:44) stated that comics can play a significant role in some settings, such as in elementary school or in adult ESL culture or conversational classes. Smith (2006:6) also claims comics as a powerful tool of teaching reading and literary analysis at any grade level. Pictures in comics can both capture students' interest because of its attractive characteristics and help the students in conveying the messages of the text.

Comics has advantages to be used as reading material in the classroom. They are motivating, visual, permanent, intermediary, popular, and development of thinking skill. Also, comics can be an alternative way for EFL students who learn reading comprehension. Hence, by using comics, the teacher may present a brand new teaching environment in the classroom.

In school, especially junior high school, various genre of text were taught in English subject, such as narrative, descriptive, procedure, and recount. The researcher chose narrative text in form of comics with fable story line as the reading material. This reason is in accordance with Barthes (1977: 79) in Hazel (2007:1) which mention that narrative is presented in many forms, such as myth, legend, fable, tale, drama, cinema, comics, history, tragedy, comedy, novella, painting, stained glass windows, news item, and conversation. As and addition, fables can teach the readers a lesson about recognizing and overcoming their foibles and purposed to poke fun (Wilhelm,

2001:144). Besides, the characters are presented in the form of animals given human qualities.

In the implementation of the treatment, the researcher used Saricoban idea (2002) about teaching reading comprehension through three-phase approach. The approach includes 3 stages, which are pre-reading, reading, and post-reading stages. Referring to those stages, the researcher adapted the procedure in order to make it suitable to be used with comics as the reading material.

2.3 Previous Study

A previous study of the effect comics on EFL students was conducted by Wulandari (2014) which investigate the effect of comics to reading comprehension on senior high school in Banyuwangi Indonesia. It was found out that the experimental group got better score than the students in control group.

Another study was done by Topkaya and Şimşek (2016) entitled The Effect of Educational Comics on the Academic Achievement and Attitude towards Earthquake. The result of the study showed that the students in experimental group made significant different with the students in control group both in academic achievement and attitude toward earthquake. This research also found that by using educational comics students can think and comment about the events more actively based on the background that they are familiar.

Thus, based on the above rationale and problems, this article aims to present the research finding on the effect of using comics towards EFL students' reading comprehension outcomes.

3. The method

3.1 *Research Context*

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Bangsalsari Jember, Indonesia. In this school, English is learnt by the students as a foreign language and as the compulsory subject in their curriculum. The curriculum used by this school is *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (Institutional Level Curriculum). In this curriculum, narrative text taught to eighth grade student in the second semester.

Based on the result of the interview of the English teacher, it was found out that comics was never been applied in teaching learning process, especially in teaching reading comprehension. In addition, the result of this research would give the teacher some information about the advantages of using comics in the teaching learning process

3.2. *Research Design*

The design of this research was quasi experimental research. Experimental research is a research where independent variables (e.g., type of treatment, teaching method, or strategy) are manipulated and dependent variables (anxiety level, comprehension, satisfaction, etc.) are measured by the researcher in order to establish cause-and-effect relationship (Yount, 2006:13-1). This research applied quasi-experimental research because true experimental research cannot be done. The aim of the research was to investigate the effect of comics as reading material toward students' reading comprehension achievement at SMP Negeri 1 Bangsalsari Jember in the 2015/2016 academic year.

3.3 Research Participants

In this research, the population of the research consisted of 257 students which were divided into seven classes. To determine the research respondent, cluster random sampling was applied in this research after determining the homogeneity of the population by analyzing students' previous score using ANOVA on SPSS program. The score was obtained from English summative test done by the English Teacher.

Based on the analysis on ANOVA program, the value of significance (Sig.) was 0.000. Because the value is lower than 0.05, it means the population was heterogeneous. As the population was heterogeneous, the researcher took out 2 classes with the closest mean score. As a result, class 8G and 8F were chosen as the participant. The 8F consisted of 38 students and the 8G consisted of 36 students.

3.4. Research data and analysis

The data of the research were obtained from reading comprehension test, and documentation. Reading comprehension test was conducted after the implementation of the treatment while interview and documentation were conducted before the implementation of the treatment .

The interview and documentation were intended to gather the data that was needed to support the research. Interview aimed to get information about learning material, media, or techniques which were applied by the teacher. In other side, documentation purposed to obtain the information about the total number of the participant and the previous score of English test. Reading comprehension test consisted of 2 kinds of test, that were try-out test and post test. According to Djiwandono, the try-out test was intended to establish the reliability coefficient of the test, the test validity, and the difficulty index of test items. Meanwhile, the post

test was intended to obtain the data in form of score which would be analyzed by using t-test. Both try-out test and post-test were in form of multiple choice questions.

Before conducting the post test, the try out test was administered to one of the classes that neither belong to the experimental nor control group, but it had the same or the closest mean difference from the experimental and the control groups, that was 8D. The try out test consisted of 30 test items, covering the material that had been taught during the implementation of the treatment that were comprehending word meaning, comprehending sentence meaning, and comprehending text meaning. The result of the tryout then was analyzed by using split-half odd-even technique.

Next, analyzing difficulty index of each test item. According to Heaton, difficulty index was generally drawn in the form of fraction or percentage that is the result of the number of the students who answer the question correctly divided by the total number of the students. There are 3 criteria of test items, difficult (0.00-0.29), fair (0.30-0.70) easy (0.71-1.00). A good test item must be neither too difficult nor too easy. It is because the test items which are too easy (>0.71) will not stimulate the students to raise their effort in answering those test items given. Yet, if the test items are too difficult (<0.29), it will make the students discouraged and unhappy to answer those test items because they totally do not understand about the test given. From the difficulty index analysis, the easy and the difficult test items were eliminated to make the test neither too difficult nor too easy. The revised test then was used as the post test for both experimental group and control group.

After conducting the posttest to both the experimental and the control groups, the data obtained were statistically analyzed by using t-test formula with 5% significance level (confidence interval 95%). Then the value of t-test was consulted to degree of freedom in order to know whether or not there was a significant effect of using comics on the eighth grade students' reading comprehension achievement. If the result of t-test was the same or greater than the value of t-table, the null hypothesis would be rejected and the alternative hypothesis would be accepted.

4. Research result and Discussion

From the data analysis, it was found that the value of t-test result was 2.03. Then, it was consulted to the t-table of 5% significance level and $df=72$. The value of t-table of 5% with $df=72$ was 1.992. The value of t-test result was higher than the value of t-table ($2.03 > 1.994$). It showed that there was a significant mean difference between the experimental and the control groups. It means that there was a significant effect of using comics as reading material on the eighth grade students' reading comprehension achievement at SMP Negeri 1 Bangsalsari Jember.

The result of the research showed that the experimental class which was taught by using comics got better result than control class which was taught by using text-only reading materials. The result of the data analysis of the post test showed that the value of t-test was 2,03 and it was higher than that t-table of $df=72$, 1.993. In other words, there was a significant effect of using comics on the eighth grade students' reading comprehension achievement at SMP Negeri 1 Bangsalsari Jember.

The researcher focused only in teaching reading comprehension of narrative text because comics itself is essentially a kind of narrative text. This statement was in line with Eisner (1985: 159), which says that one of fundamental aspects in comics is narrative. The other reason is that the material of narrative text also was taught in the eighth grade students of junior high school.

Comics communicate in two different medium, picture and text (Eisner, 1985:13). Picture can help the students in understanding the text. And so the text, it gives the readers information about what they read. During the implementation of the research, more students of experimental class can do the exercises better than the control class. This condition happened because more students in the experimental class could answer the questions about the synonym of the word or the similar meaning of the sentence than the control class. For the example the word “snooze”, “fast”, and the sentence “I’m too loaded down with carrots”. In the comics, the word “snooze” appeared and was followed by the picture of the character laying down under the tree with the “BZZZZ” SFX. The word “fast” as well, appeared and was followed by the picture of motion. Same case also found in guessing the idiom. The sentence “I’m too loaded down with carrot” also was appeared and was followed by the picture of the character pointing his big belly. Therefore, related to these findings, the researcher assumed that the pictures in comics help the students to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words, sentences, or even the idioms. This statement was strengthened by Başal, Aytan, and Demir (2016) which found that the combination of visuals and text in a storyline is more effective in teaching idiomatic expression than in teaching them with traditional way.

Moreover, compared to the control class, more students of experimental class could guess the moral value of the story. This condition was found during the teaching and learning process when they did exercise 2. As we know, to guess the moral value of the story, we must comprehend what the whole story is about. Implicitly, related to this finding, by using comics students’ thinking skill was aided to comprehend the content of the story. This finding is in line with Versaci (2001) who stated that comics books help to develop analytical and critical thinking skills. Smith (2006:6) also stated that comics can be used as aids in the development of reading skill by making visualization of the story. From these statements, it can be

said that pictures and texts in comics can help the students to predict and guess what the text was about.

Further, Smith (2006:6) stated that the combination between picture and text makes comics as a good reading material which not only can stimulate the readers' interest but also help the readers understand what they read easier. Referring to the statement, the students' interest can be stimulated because pictures in comics prevent the students feel bored while they do reading. The same condition happened during the teaching learning process. Compared to the control class, the students in experimental class showed their interest and willingness to read the comics. They were also actively involved in the teaching learning process. These findings are also proved by the idea of Berkowitz and Packer (2001) which stated that comics can be used as a motivational and educational tool. Thus, comics can support the teacher to arouse the students' interest and make the teaching learning process easier.

Based on the explanation above, the use of comics in the classroom can be as an alternative way in teaching reading comprehension. Not only can comics bring new atmosphere in teaching learning process, it also helps the students learn reading comprehension easier. Based on the result of the research, it was showed that comics, as reading materials, gave a significant effect on the eighth grade students' reading comprehension achievement at SMP Negeri 1 Bangsalsari Jember in the 2015/2016 academic year. So in conclusion, comics was appropriate and powerful reading material for students in learning reading comprehension compared to text-only reading material.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the data analysis post test score of the eighth grade students, hypothesis verification, and discussion, it could be concluded as there was a

significant effect of using comics as the reading material on the eighth grade students' reading comprehension achievement at SMP Negeri 1 Bangsalsari Jember in the 2015/2016 academic year.

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