



An Analysis of Webtoon Application Usage as a Learning Medium in Reading Comprehension Skills of 11th Grade Students at SMA Negeri 6 Bengkulu Tengah

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the use of the Webtoon application as a learning medium and to examine students' perceptions of its use in reading comprehension skills of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Bengkulu Tengah. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques consisting of observation, interviews, and documentation. The research subjects included one English teacher and eight eleventh-grade students who were selected through purposive sampling. The findings indicate that the use of the Webtoon application as a reading learning medium has a positive impact on students' reading comprehension skills. Webtoon can increase students' interest, motivation, and engagement in the learning process. Visual support in the form of images, character expressions, and storylines helps students understand the reading content, identify main ideas, comprehend new vocabulary, and follow the storyline coherently. In addition, students showed very positive perceptions of the use of Webtoon because the learning activities became more interesting, enjoyable, and less monotonous. However, this study also identified several challenges in using Webtoon as a learning medium. These challenges include limited internet access, which occasionally disrupted students' ability to access the application; limited storage capacity on students' devices, which prevented some students from installing the application; and students' tendency to focus more on visual elements than on the reading text itself. Nevertheless, these challenges did not significantly hinder the learning process, as they could be addressed through clear instructions, continuous guidance, and effective classroom management by the teacher. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Webtoon application is an effective, relevant, and practical learning medium to support students' reading comprehension skills at the secondary school level.

Keywords : Learning Medium; Reading Comprehension; Students Perceptions; Webtoon Application

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a fundamental tool for human communication and intellectual development, with reading being one of its most critical skills. In the context of English language learning, reading comprehension enables students to acquire knowledge, expand vocabulary, and develop cognitive and analytical abilities (Dolean & Prodan, 2023). However, reading literacy in Indonesia remains alarmingly low. According to the 2019 PISA report, Indonesia ranked 62nd out of 70 countries in reading literacy, indicating widespread difficulties among students in comprehending texts, identifying implicit meanings, and making contextual inferences. This issue is further corroborated by the 2021 PIRLS results, which placed Indonesia 41st out of 45 countries, with an average score significantly below the international mean. Such deficiencies not only hinder academic performance in English but also affect understanding in other text-dependent subjects, reflecting a systemic weakness in reading culture and instructional effectiveness within Indonesian education (Rahmi & Marnola, 2020).

At the local level, similar challenges are observed at SMA Negeri 6 Bengkulu Tengah, where many eleventh-grade students struggle with reading comprehension. Teachers report that students often fail to grasp main ideas, infer meaning, or interpret vocabulary in context. These difficulties are exacerbated by low reading interest, limited access to engaging materials, and conventional teaching methods that rely heavily on textbooks, which often fail to motivate digital-native learners (Febrita & Ulfah, 2019). Consequently, there is a pressing need for innovative, visually supported, and interactive learning media that can bridge the gap between students' digital experiences and educational objectives, thereby enhancing both engagement and comprehension.

Recent research has begun exploring the potential of digital comics, particularly Webtoon, as an educational medium. For instance, Misnayanti et al. (2022) found that Webtoon significantly improved reading comprehension among high school students, attributing its effectiveness to visual support and narrative engagement. Similarly, Khudlori et al. (2022) demonstrated that Android-based Webtoon applications enhanced English literacy and motivation during pandemic learning. Further studies, such as those by Rafida et al. (2023) and Rohmatulhaq & Sabiq (2024), highlighted Webtoon's positive impact on reading interest, vocabulary retention, and self-directed learning. A literature review by Misnayanti et al. (2024) also concluded that Webtoon's interactive and episodic format makes reading more enjoyable and less monotonous.

Despite these promising findings, existing studies exhibit certain limitations. Most have employed quantitative or mixed-methods designs focused on learning outcomes, with less emphasis on qualitative exploration of implementation processes and student perceptions in authentic classroom settings. Moreover, prior research has not sufficiently addressed contextual challenges such as internet accessibility, device limitations, and teacher readiness. These factors particularly relevant in schools with limited digital infrastructure, like SMA Negeri 6 Bengkulu Tengah.

While previous studies affirm Webtoon's potential as a learning medium, there remains a noticeable gap between theoretical endorsements and practical, context-sensitive implementation in Indonesian public high schools. Specifically, little is known about how Webtoon is systematically integrated into reading instruction, how students perceive its use beyond mere engagement, and what operational constraints arise in resource-limited settings. Existing studies have not sufficiently examined the qualitative aspects of Webtoon implementation in educational settings. This includes a lack of in-depth analysis of teacher strategies, classroom interactions, and how students engage with multimodal content. Such explorations are particularly scarce within the specific sociocultural and technological context of schools in Bengkulu Tengah.

This study seeks to address these gaps by adopting a descriptive qualitative approach to examine not only the outcomes but also the processes and perceptions associated with using Webtoon as a reading medium. By focusing on the actual experiences of teachers and students at SMA Negeri 6 Bengkulu Tengah, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Webtoon's pedagogical role and practical challenges, thereby contributing to more grounded and applicable insights for similar educational contexts.

Based on the identified gaps in the literature and the specific contextual needs outlined, this study is designed to address two interconnected areas of inquiry. First, it aims to examine the practical application and integration of the Webtoon application as a learning medium within the reading comprehension instruction for eleventh-grade students. Second, it seeks to understand and document the students' own perceptions regarding the use of Webtoon in their reading activities. Consequently, the research is guided by the following objectives: to analyze the implementation process and pedagogical strategies involved in using Webtoon for reading

comprehension, and to identify the spectrum of student perceptions concerning its effectiveness, engagement value, and challenges. Through this focused investigation, the study intends to provide a nuanced, qualitative understanding of both the operational dynamics and the learner experiences associated with this digital medium in a real classroom setting.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design conducted through field research to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in its natural setting (Fadli, 2021). The research was carried out at SMA Negeri 6 Bengkulu Tengah, focusing on the eleventh-grade population. The subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, consisting of one English teacher and eight eleventh-grade students who were directly involved in Webtoon-based learning activities (Sugiyono, 2021). This approach ensured that the participants could provide rich and meaningful data relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected through three primary data collection techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was conducted to capture classroom dynamics and the learning process involving Webtoon. Structured interviews were held with both the teacher and students using pre-designed guidelines to gather in-depth insights into experiences and perceptions. Documentation included Webtoon content used in lessons, student assignments, and classroom photos. The instruments, such as interview protocols and observation sheets, were developed based on the research questions and validated through expert input. For data analysis, the interactive model by Miles & Huberman (1984) was applied, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, while data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Sugiyono, 2015).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research was conducted over a one-month period, from September 30 to October 30, at SMAN 6 Bengkulu Tengah, beginning with two preliminary classroom observations on October 8 and 15. The initial observations indicated that eleventh-grade students were already accustomed to using digital reading platforms and frequently accessed Webtoon content both during and outside learning activities. The students demonstrated an ability to understand Webtoon's visual features, such as panel sequences, speech bubbles, and illustrations, which helped them follow the storyline, understand vocabulary, and grasp the characters' intentions. Although most students perceived Webtoon as an engaging medium that supported reading comprehension, the observations also revealed concerns regarding potential distractions and overreliance on visual elements.

Based on these initial insights, the study focused on the use of the Webtoon application as a learning medium and students' perceptions of its relevance in reading comprehension activities. The research data were obtained through interviews with one English teacher and eight eleventh-grade students who were directly involved in Webtoon-based learning. The findings of the study consist of an analysis of the use of the Webtoon application as a learning medium as well as students' perceptions of its use in reading comprehension skills.

Based on classroom observations and interviews with both the teacher and students, the implementation of Webtoon as a learning medium followed a structured yet interactive approach. The teacher selected episodes with appropriate language levels and thematic relevance, displayed them via laptop, and guided students to access the content on their own devices. Activities included joint reading, group discussions on plot and characters, and tasks such as identifying main ideas and key information. This structured integration helped maintain

focus on learning objectives while leveraging the engaging format of digital comics.

Students reported that the visual and narrative elements of Webtoon significantly aided their reading comprehension. The combination of images, character expressions, and sequenced storytelling helped them infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary, follow the plot coherently, and better understand contextual and emotional nuances within the text. Many noted that the visual support reduced their dependence on direct translation and made the reading process less intimidating and more enjoyable.

Furthermore, students expressed highly positive perceptions regarding the use of Webtoon in learning. They described the experience as fun, engaging, and markedly different from conventional textbook-based reading. The comic-like format increased their motivation and attention, reducing boredom and encouraging voluntary reading both inside and outside the classroom. Students felt that learning felt less like a formal task and more like an enjoyable activity, which enhanced their overall engagement with English reading materials.

Despite these positive outcomes, several technical and pedagogical challenges were identified. Limited internet connectivity, insufficient storage space on some students' devices, and occasional over-reliance on visuals rather than text were noted as constraints. Additionally, the teacher emphasized the need for continuous guidance to ensure students remained focused on comprehension tasks rather than merely enjoying the storyline. These challenges, however, did not substantially hinder the learning process and were managed through prepared instructions and responsive classroom management.

Discussion

The research findings demonstrate that employing the Webtoon application positively influenced both the process and outcomes of reading comprehension instruction for eleventh-grade students. Data from observations and interviews revealed that students exhibited increased interest, focus, and active participation when engaging with texts presented through Webtoon, attributing this enhanced engagement to the supportive imagery, character expressions, and coherent narratives that facilitated text comprehension.

Pedagogically, Webtoon functioned as an effective medium by presenting stories sequentially through visual panels. This structure enabled learners to identify main ideas, locate key information, and follow plotlines with greater ease. The visualization of characters and settings assisted students in interpreting vocabulary and narrative context without sole reliance on word-for-word translation, underscoring its role as a tool that supports comprehension through text-visual integration (Arsyad, 2003).

The effectiveness of Webtoon aligns with established instructional media theory, which posits that visual elements can capture learner attention, boost motivation, and promote more effective understanding of material. In reading instruction, Webtoon serves as a multimodal medium that presents information both visually and verbally, thereby aiding students in constructing meaning from texts more comprehensively.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with Snow's (2002) perspective on reading comprehension as an interaction between the reader, the text, and the context. Webtoon provides a rich visual context through character illustrations, facial expressions, and settings, which helps students decipher textual meaning, character emotions, and event relationships. Consequently, students are better equipped to follow storylines sequentially and grasp central ideas.

From the learners' perspective, Webtoon was perceived as enjoyable, engaging, and instrumental in understanding English reading texts. Students reported that the visual components made it easier to comprehend new vocabulary, identify main ideas, and grasp overall narrative content. These perceptions indicate that Webtoon can increase students' interest and comfort in reading, ultimately exerting a positive effect on their comprehension

skills.

The present findings are consistent with prior studies, such as those by Misnayanti et al. (2022) and Khudlori et al. (2022), which concluded that Webtoon enhances reading comprehension by supporting the meaning-making process and increases motivation and engagement in English language learning. This congruence supports the assertion that Webtoon is an effective medium for aiding reading comprehension in a more contextualized and engaging manner.

Nevertheless, the study also identified several implementation challenges, including limited internet access, insufficient storage capacity on student devices, and a tendency among some learners to focus more on images than on the text itself. The teacher emphasized that continuous guidance and supervision remain necessary to ensure students not only enjoy the visuals but also achieve a deep understanding of the reading content, highlighting the critical role of the educator in mediating the use of technology to align with instructional objectives.

In summary, this discussion illustrates that the research findings corroborate relevant theories and previous studies, indicating that Webtoon is an effective learning medium for improving secondary school students' reading comprehension skills. It enhances student interest and engagement, aids in understanding textual content more readily, and fosters a more enjoyable and contextualized reading learning environment. With proper management and guidance, Webtoon holds significant potential as an effective reading instructional medium at the secondary school level.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of the Webtoon application as a reading learning medium for eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 6 Bengkulu Tengah has a positive impact on the English learning process. Webtoon creates a more engaging learning environment and encourages students' active involvement in understanding reading texts. The visual elements and storyline presented in Webtoon help students comprehend the content of the texts and acquire vocabulary in a more contextual way. Students' responses toward the use of Webtoon indicate positive attitudes, particularly in terms of learning interest and comfort. Although several technical challenges were identified in its implementation, the issues did not significantly hinder the learning process, as they could be managed through effective teacher guidance and classroom management. Therefore, the Webtoon application is considered a feasible alternative learning medium for supporting students' reading comprehension skills at the secondary school level. Based on the research findings and conclusions presented, it is recommended that future researchers further investigate the application of Webtoon or similar digital media by employing varied methodologies and focusing on different variables. Potential research avenues include exploring its impact on other language skills, such as writing, speaking, and listening, or utilizing quantitative approaches to yield more comprehensive and generalizable results.

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