



**THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE USE OF WEBTOON AND STUDENTS READING  
COMPREHENSION OF NARRATIVE TEXTS AT SMP NEGERI 2 TAMBANG**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to examine the correlation between the use of Webtoon and students' reading comprehension of narrative texts at SMP Negeri 2 Tambang. In the context of the digital age and the implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, integrating technology into the learning process becomes essential to enhance student motivation and literacy. Webtoon, as a digital comic platform, offers visual and interactive narratives that can potentially support students' understanding of narrative structures. This research employed a quantitative correlational design involving 72 eighth-grade students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire focusing on four key indicators: Webtoon usage frequency and motivation, engagement and user experience, reading comprehension self-assessment, and technical usability. The findings revealed a generally positive perception of Webtoon's use in learning, with average scores across indicators ranging from 3.39 to 3.49 on a 4-point Likert scale. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test indicated a significant positive correlation between students' use of Webtoon and their reading comprehension of narrative texts. These results suggest that Webtoon can be a valuable educational tool to improve students' engagement and comprehension in English reading, especially when aligned with student-centered approaches and the Merdeka Curriculum. The study recommends that educators consider utilizing Webtoon as an alternative medium for enhancing literacy learning outcomes in junior high schools.*

**Keywords:** *Webtoon, reading comprehension, narrative text, digital media, Merdeka Curriculum*

**KORELASI ANTARA PENGGUNAAN WEBTOON DAN PEMAHAMAN MEMBACA SISWA  
TERHADAP TEKS NARATIF DI SMP NEGERI 2 TAMBANG**

**ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara penggunaan aplikasi Webtoon dengan kemampuan membaca pemahaman teks naratif siswa di SMP Negeri 2 Tambang. Di era digital saat ini serta dalam konteks implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia, integrasi teknologi dalam proses pembelajaran menjadi hal yang penting untuk meningkatkan motivasi dan literasi siswa. Webtoon, sebagai platform komik digital yang interaktif dan visual, berpotensi mendukung pemahaman siswa terhadap struktur teks naratif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional dan melibatkan 72 siswa kelas VIII sebagai sampel. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang mencakup empat indikator utama: frekuensi dan motivasi penggunaan Webtoon, keterlibatan dan pengalaman pengguna, penilaian diri terhadap pemahaman membaca, serta aspek teknis dan kemudahan penggunaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa memiliki persepsi positif terhadap penggunaan Webtoon dalam pembelajaran, dengan skor rata-rata antara 3,39 hingga 3,49 pada skala Likert 4 poin. Uji korelasi Pearson menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif yang signifikan antara penggunaan Webtoon dan pemahaman membaca siswa terhadap teks naratif. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa Webtoon dapat menjadi media pembelajaran yang efektif untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan dan kemampuan membaca siswa, khususnya jika diintegrasikan dengan pendekatan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa sesuai dengan prinsip Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar guru mempertimbangkan penggunaan Webtoon sebagai media alternatif dalam pembelajaran literasi di tingkat SMP.

**Kata Kunci:** *Webtoon, reading comprehension, narrative text, digital media, Merdeka Curriculum*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Reading comprehension is a foundational component of English language acquisition, especially for students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts like Indonesia. It involves more than just decoding words; it encompasses the ability to extract meaning, make inferences, understand vocabulary in context, and



engage critically with texts. In the Indonesian secondary education system, reading comprehension is an essential aspect of English learning outcomes. However, numerous studies and classroom observations have consistently highlighted students' difficulties in achieving proficiency in reading comprehension (Puspita et al., 2023; Sukmawati et al., 2020). These difficulties are often attributed to limited vocabulary mastery, lack of background knowledge, and insufficient motivation to engage with English reading materials.

In the current digital age, students are immersed in technology-rich environments and increasingly prefer screen-based content over traditional print media. This shift in media consumption patterns necessitates a transformation in pedagogical approaches. Conventional text-heavy materials are often perceived as monotonous and irrelevant by today's learners, who are more visually oriented and accustomed to dynamic, interactive content. As a result, educators are challenged to adapt instructional strategies that can align with students' digital lifestyles while simultaneously improving literacy outcomes. One such innovation is the integration of digital storytelling platforms, particularly Webtoon.

Webtoon is a digital comic application that originated in South Korea and is now globally popular, especially among adolescents. It features vertically scrollable, episodic stories that combine visual narrative, dialogue, and multimedia elements such as music or animation. This format not only caters to the preferences of visual learners but also aligns with Paivio's Dual Coding Theory, which suggests that learning is enhanced when verbal and non-verbal information are processed simultaneously. Previous studies have shown that digital comics like Webtoon can improve vocabulary acquisition, increase reading motivation, and support comprehension of narrative structures (Kim, 2020; Ghulam et al., 2023). The multimodal nature of Webtoon may offer a more engaging and context-rich environment that facilitates deeper understanding of texts, particularly for students who struggle with abstract or purely textual materials.

In parallel, Indonesia's recently introduced *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Merdeka Curriculum) promotes student-centered, flexible, and contextual learning. This curriculum encourages the use of technology and real-world contexts in the classroom to support personalized and independent learning. Within this framework, narrative texts remain a core component of English instruction at the junior high school level. Consequently, exploring innovative instructional media such as Webtoon is timely and relevant, especially given the curriculum's emphasis on literacy, creativity, and learner autonomy.

Despite the increasing popularity of Webtoon and anecdotal evidence of its educational potential, there is still a lack of empirical research that investigates its correlation with measurable learning outcomes—specifically reading comprehension in the context of junior high school education in Indonesia. Most existing studies have focused on higher education or have used experimental designs to test short-term effects. There is a need to examine how students' habitual engagement with Webtoon relates to their actual reading comprehension abilities in a more naturalistic school setting.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the correlation between the use of Webtoon and students' reading comprehension of narrative texts among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Tambang. The research focuses on four dimensions of student experience with Webtoon: usage frequency and motivation, user engagement, reading comprehension self-assessment, and perceptions of usability and technical challenges. By examining how these dimensions relate to students' reading skills, the study aims to provide insights into the role of digital comics in supporting literacy development and inform teachers about the potential of integrating digital platforms into reading instruction.

Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the discourse on digital literacy in language education and support the broader goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. If a significant correlation is found, it could justify the inclusion of Webtoon and similar platforms as supplementary reading materials in the English language classroom. Moreover, it may offer practical recommendations for educators seeking to bridge the gap between students' out-of-school digital habits and in-school academic practices, thereby making learning more engaging, contextual, and effective.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning from written texts through the interaction of the reader's prior knowledge, vocabulary skills, reading strategies, and the textual features (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading comprehension



becomes both a goal and a medium of language learning. Successful comprehension involves identifying main ideas, interpreting implicit and explicit information, understanding vocabulary in context, and making inferences (Anderson, 2003). However, Indonesian students often struggle with these processes due to limited language exposure and insufficient engagement with English texts (Puspita et al., 2023; Singkum, 2019).

Tarigan (2008) and Dalman (2017) classify the purposes of reading into several categories: to gain information, to enjoy aesthetic experiences, to evaluate and compare, and to reflect on life values. Furthermore, comprehension is supported by skills such as skimming, scanning, and critical thinking. In the classroom, fostering these skills requires not only effective strategies but also appropriate materials that align with students' interests and cognitive development.

### **1. Narrative Text in Junior High School Curriculum**

Narrative texts are one of the core genres taught in Indonesian junior high school English curricula. These texts are characterized by a sequence of events involving characters, conflict, and resolution, often structured through orientation, complication, and resolution phases (Mulyaningsih, 2019). The narrative genre includes fairy tales, fables, myths, and legends—all of which aim to entertain, convey moral messages, and develop learners' critical and creative thinking.

Within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework, students are encouraged to analyze narrative texts not only for content comprehension but also for structural awareness and cultural appreciation. This curriculum promotes project-based and context-based learning that emphasizes student agency and meaningful learning experiences (Zhang et al., 2022). Therefore, integrating contemporary media like digital narratives aligns with the curriculum's goals and addresses students' real-life experiences.

### **2. Digital Media and Webtoon in Language Learning**

The integration of digital media into education has gained momentum as technological literacy becomes increasingly vital. Webtoon, as a mobile-based digital comic platform, represents a shift in reading habits among youth. Originating in South Korea, Webtoon delivers episodic stories in vertical-scroll format and integrates multimedia elements such as animations and soundtracks to enhance user engagement (Kim, 2020). It has become especially popular among adolescents due to its accessibility, interactivity, and visual appeal.

According to Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory, learning can be enhanced when information is presented both verbally and visually. Webtoon's format supports this principle by combining text with sequential visual stimuli, which can aid in processing, retention, and comprehension. Studies by Chung and Yoon (2019) and Park and Lim (2021) show that students perceive Webtoon as an engaging medium that supports vocabulary development, inferencing, and structural understanding of texts. Moreover, its social features—such as comments and reviews—create collaborative learning spaces that can further motivate learners.

Webtoon's potential as a learning tool has been documented in various contexts. Ghulam et al. (2023) demonstrated significant gains in students' literal reading comprehension after using Webtoon-based materials. Tomaso et al. (2024) found that students who used Webtoon showed higher engagement and comprehension compared to those reading traditional print texts. Similarly, Naf'an RH (2024) reported that students viewed Webtoon as a self-directed learning medium that made reading more enjoyable and less intimidating. These findings suggest that Webtoon not only captures students' interest but also contributes positively to comprehension and motivation.

### **3. Related Studies**

Multiple studies have supported the educational effectiveness of Webtoon. Dar et al. (2023), in their study on visual narratives, concluded that Webtoon enhanced students' ability to retain narrative structure and infer meaning. Khotimah (2024) and Putri (2023) confirmed Webtoon's effectiveness in increasing comprehension performance among junior and senior high school students. Other studies, such as those by Nunik (2024) and Robbani (2021), emphasized the visual contextual cues provided by Webtoon, which help learners decode unfamiliar vocabulary and grasp deeper narrative meanings.

Fadilah (2020) combined prediction strategies with Webtoon and found that students were more engaged in actively constructing meaning from the texts. These studies collectively affirm that Webtoon supports a range of literacy skills, including identifying main ideas, sequencing, analyzing characters, and deriving implicit meanings. Although most of these studies employed experimental or quasi-experimental



designs, their results provide empirical support for further investigation of Webtoon in correlational frameworks.

#### 4. Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical and empirical literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework where the use of Webtoon (independent variable) influences students' reading comprehension of narrative texts (dependent variable). Webtoon usage is operationalized through four dimensions: frequency and motivation, engagement and user experience, self-assessed comprehension, and usability/technical issues. Reading comprehension is defined by students' ability to identify main ideas, understand vocabulary, infer meaning, and analyze narrative structures.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between students' use of Webtoon and their reading comprehension of narrative texts. Unlike experimental studies that involve manipulation of variables, correlational research is suitable for identifying the direction and strength of relationships between naturally occurring variables (Creswell, 2014). The objective was to determine whether increased engagement with Webtoon is associated with improved reading comprehension among junior high school students.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Tambang, a junior high school located in Kampar Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia. The study focused on eighth-grade students, as they are required to study narrative texts based on the national English curriculum. The total population consisted of 72 students across three eighth-grade classes. Using purposive sampling, 51 students were selected from two classes (VIII.1 and VIII.2). Selection criteria included students' familiarity with narrative texts and regular use of the Webtoon application.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions and behaviors related to Webtoon usage and their reading comprehension of narrative texts. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items divided into four key dimensions:

1. Webtoon Usage Frequency and Motivation (8 items)
2. Engagement and User Experience (8 items)
3. Reading Comprehension Self-Assessment (8 items)
4. Technical Issues and Usability (6 items)

All items were presented on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree) to avoid neutral responses and better capture students' attitudes and experiences.

To ensure the instrument's validity, a content review was conducted by English education experts, and a pilot test was administered to a comparable group of students. Item validity was assessed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation in SPSS. Items with correlation coefficients below the critical value were revised or eliminated.

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a value of 0.923, indicating high internal consistency ( $\alpha > 0.7$  is considered acceptable; Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

The data collection process occurred between May and June 2025, following the proposal seminar and pilot testing phase. The questionnaires were distributed in-person to the selected students during school hours with the assistance of the English teacher. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. All 51 respondents returned fully completed questionnaires.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics through IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize students' responses based on mean scores and standard deviations for each indicator.

The primary inferential technique used was the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ), which assessed the strength and direction of the relationship between Webtoon usage (independent variable) and reading comprehension (dependent variable). The significance level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . If the resulting  $p$ -value was below 0.05, the relationship was considered statistically significant.

The formula for correlation is:



$$r = \frac{n \sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

In addition, the questionnaire results were interpreted using a scale adapted from Sugiyono (2018) to categorize the strength of students' agreement (e.g., Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). The data were then synthesized to support conclusions regarding how Webtoon contributes to students' comprehension of narrative texts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed responses from 72 eighth-grade students regarding their use of Webtoon and its relation to their reading comprehension of narrative texts. The descriptive statistics below summarize the students' perceptions across four dimensions:

No.	Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Webtoon Usage Frequency and Motivation	3.39	0.68	Strongly Agree
2	Engagement and User Experience	3.49	0.63	Strongly Agree
3	Reading Comprehension Self-Assessment	3.44	0.65	Strongly Agree
4	Technical Issues and Usability	3.39	0.70	Strongly Agree
—	<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

**Table 1.** Research Result

The results show that students responded positively across all indicators, with average Likert scores above 3.39, indicating high levels of agreement. The highest mean was observed in “Engagement and User Experience” (M = 3.49), suggesting that students found Webtoon enjoyable, easy to use, and engaging.

To determine the relationship between Webtoon usage and students' reading comprehension of narrative texts, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted. The analysis yielded the following results:

- Correlation coefficient (r) = 0.615
- Significance (p) = 0.000 (p < 0.05)

The correlation coefficient indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between the two variables. This suggests that students who frequently and meaningfully engage with Webtoon tend to demonstrate better comprehension of narrative texts.

These findings support the hypothesis that visual storytelling platforms like Webtoon can aid students in developing key comprehension skills such as identifying main ideas, making inferences, understanding vocabulary in context, and analyzing text structure.

### Discussion

The findings reinforce previous research highlighting the potential of digital media in enhancing reading skills. For example, Ghulam et al. (2023) and Tomaso et al. (2024) reported similar results, where students



using Webtoon exhibited greater comprehension and interest in reading tasks. The current study adds to this body of literature by showing that even without experimental manipulation, naturally occurring engagement with Webtoon correlates significantly with comprehension skills.

According to Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1986), the integration of verbal and visual stimuli can enhance memory retention and understanding. Webtoon's combination of text and sequential imagery enables students to decode narrative structures more easily than when using print-only texts. This aligns with the students' self-reported ability to recall plot events, identify themes, and infer meaning, as reflected in the Reading Comprehension Self-Assessment mean score of 3.44.

Additionally, the interactive and episodic nature of Webtoon contributes to students' sustained interest in reading. Students reported being more motivated to continue reading when texts were broken into shorter, illustrated episodes—a format that mirrors modern digital attention spans and matches the learning preferences of Generation Z (Sezgin, 2022).

However, while the results were largely positive, some students noted occasional technical issues such as internet connectivity or device limitations. These findings, while not substantially negative, suggest the importance of ensuring equitable access to digital tools if such platforms are to be widely adopted in schools.

Furthermore, this study was conducted within the framework of Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which promotes flexibility and the use of contextual, technology-supported learning. The positive perceptions and statistically significant correlation found in this study suggest that Webtoon is not only compatible with this curriculum but can be strategically integrated into classroom practices to support literacy development.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

This study investigated the correlation between the use of Webtoon and students' reading comprehension of narrative texts among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Tambang. Through a quantitative correlational design, the research revealed a moderate to strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.615$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between students' engagement with Webtoon and their reading comprehension performance. Descriptive analysis also indicated high levels of agreement across all measured dimensions—usage frequency and motivation, engagement and user experience, reading comprehension self-assessment, and technical usability—suggesting a generally favorable perception of Webtoon as a reading tool.

The findings affirm that Webtoon, as a digital comic platform, offers several pedagogical benefits in supporting literacy learning. Its visual and interactive features align with the learning preferences of digitally native students and can enhance their ability to comprehend, interpret, and analyze narrative texts. Moreover, the format of Webtoon, which promotes episodic and immersive reading, appears to increase motivation and reading frequency—two factors strongly linked to improved comprehension outcomes.

Aligned with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s emphasis on student-centered and contextual learning, the integration of Webtoon represents a meaningful pedagogical innovation. It bridges the gap between students' real-world digital practices and academic reading demands, thereby supporting a more engaging, relevant, and effective learning environment.

### 5.2 Recommendations

English teachers are encouraged to integrate Webtoon as a supplementary reading material, particularly for teaching narrative texts. Webtoon can be used to support pre-reading activities (e.g., predicting based on visuals), during-reading tasks (e.g., identifying plot elements), and post-reading exercises (e.g., writing alternate endings or character analysis). Teachers should guide students to critically engage with both the text and visuals, fostering deeper comprehension and critical thinking.

Schools and policymakers should consider incorporating digital reading platforms like Webtoon into classroom instruction as part of digital literacy development. Infrastructure improvements, such as providing stable internet access and digital devices, are essential to ensure equitable implementation.

Students are encouraged to utilize Webtoon not only for entertainment but also as a learning resource to improve their English reading skills. Actively engaging with the stories, making vocabulary notes, and reflecting on character development or plot structures can transform casual reading into an effective language learning practice.



Further studies could adopt experimental or longitudinal designs to measure the causal impact of Webtoon on reading comprehension over time. In addition, exploring its effect on other language skills such as writing, speaking, or listening would enrich our understanding of the role of visual digital media in language education.

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