

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the study and presents the general overview of the research. It elaborates on the research background, problem identification, and research limitations that establish the context and scope of the study. Furthermore, this chapter presents the research questions, research objectives, and research significance that guide the overall direction of the study.

1.1 Research Background

Reading comprehension is an essential skill for language learning and for comprehending learning materials in various subjects, including social studies, science, and math. According to Sangia (2014), reading is a crucial linguistic ability that requires thoughtful consideration. Students who read effectively have a greater ability to understand the content they are studying. Therefore, greater attention should be given to reading-related instruction, particularly in language learning contexts. Reading gives students access to ideas and knowledge from other eras and locations, which enhances their view of the world and supports their viewpoints. In today's globalized world, reading in a foreign language also supports academic and job opportunities while fostering personal and cognitive development. To encourage students' learning progress, there must be a special focus on supporting the developing reading abilities from a young age and offering specialized reading teaching (Balansag, 2025). Moreover, reading comprehension is vital for cultivating higher-order thinking skills, such as identifying main ideas, recognizing key information, drawing conclusions, and

relating textual information to prior knowledge or personal experiences. In this way, students not only learn to read but also develop the ability to read in order to learn (Aisyah et al., 2024).

However, the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that there is an urgent need for support in terms of scientific literacy. In terms of scientific literacy, Indonesia ranked 70th out of 78 participating countries in the 2018 PISA results, indicating a lower skill level than many other countries. The OECD (2023) states that Indonesian student PISA 2022 reading literacy scores were still below the global average score of 476 significantly higher than Indonesia's average reading score of 359. These results show that many Indonesian students still struggle to comprehend text, identify significant information, and analyze meaning.

The Minimum Competency Assessment (*Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum/ AKM*) is another method used in Indonesia to evaluate reading literacy in addition to PISA. According to Pusat Asesmen Pendidikan (2022), reading literacy is the capacity of students to comprehend, apply, assess, and reflect on written materials in order to achieve objectives, obtain knowledge, and contribute successfully to society. Three cognitive processes are used by AKM to evaluate literacy: accessing and retrieving information, understanding and integrating information, and evaluating, and reflecting on knowledge. Students in elementary school, especially those in upper primary, are required to gradually grasp these competencies

Indonesian students earned the minimum competence level (Level 2) in reading, and barely any achieved high proficiency levels (Level 5 and above). According to Bilad et al. (2024), this condition shows that many primary school students experience difficulties in identifying key concepts, comprehending implicit meanings, differentiating between relevant and irrelevant material, and critically evaluating texts. Wulandari et al. (2025) stated that unsuitable motivation and interest in reading activities, particularly in the early stages of learning, is a significant obstacle to primary school students being able to develop their reading skills. This disinterest can be related to a tendency to select activities that are thought to be enjoyable. Reading can be viewed as less interesting by students who are already used to technology and digital media than more interactive and visual exercises. Creating engaging reading experiences is further complicated by the lack of varied reading materials. Traditional reading media may lack the interactive aspects necessary to keep students engaged. Thus, interesting and interactive reading resources are required to support students' reading experiences and comprehension (Day et al. 2024) In line with this, Olmos (2009) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in supporting students' reading comprehension skills.

Promoting students' awareness of global issues is just as important as supporting their reading comprehension. Students who struggle with reading comprehension may find the challenging to comprehend knowledge on global issues that impact people and society. As a result, improving reading comprehension might give students more opportunities to interact with relevant

literature and become aware with critical global concerns. This relationship emphasizes the significance of incorporating global goals into reading materials, especially for elementary school students.

One of the important global issues focused on in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This SDG emphasizes the importance of reducing social, economic, and political disparities both within and between countries (Kanbur, 2021). High inequality is a major barrier to sustainable development because it affects access to resources such as jobs, healthcare, and education. Education is a key strategy in achieving SDG 10 because through learning that integrates the values of equality, human rights, and social justice, students can develop empathy, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility from an early age (Apel, 2020).

By integrating the concept of SDG 10 into teaching methods, schools can help create a future generation capable of reducing systemic inequality and promoting an inclusive and equitable society globally (UNESCO, 2017). Since children are in an important phase of character development at a young age, this process must begin in elementary school. Elementary students must be taught about Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) in order to foster empathy, tolerance, and a sense of justice in their minds at a young age. Students who comprehend the advantages of reducing inequality will be able to reject discriminating and bullying behaviour both within and outside of the classroom, thereby contributing to a welcoming and peaceful learning environment. Furthermore, they are better able to respect diversity and work with others with various backgrounds after learning about

social and economic inequalities. This helps students develop good character and prepares them to become honest, responsible people in the future. Therefore, integrating the values of SDG 10 into basic education is an essential first step in reducing social inequality and ensuring fair educational opportunities for every student.

To understand the concept of SDG 10 effectively, innovative approaches such as providing digital comic media, educational games and interactive stories can be used. Students in elementary school need an engaging and creative way to understand the concept of Reduced Inequalities. Children can see real-life examples of inequality, like disparities in access to play areas or schooling, as well as how the characters in the stories attempt to support their peers, through digital comics or picture books. Furthermore, cooperative educational games like role-playing or interactive puzzles can teach kids how to cooperate and appreciate different viewpoints, making equality more than just a theoretical idea but a real-world experience. Additionally, this type of approach encourages the early development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills. Children learn the value of minimizing injustice through this imaginative and entertaining approach, which also inspires them to act justly and with compassion in their everyday lives. SDG 10, which focuses on lowering inequality both within and between nations. In order to create a generation that is more compassionate and just, education that takes into account children's emotional, social, and cognitive needs is essential.

Digital comic is a powerful media to support elementary school students' reading comprehension. By combining text with attractive images, this media increases students' reading motivation and engagement. Because digital comic offer interactive, contextual, and realistic information, recent studies have shown that their use can support students' educational experiences (Hidayat & Sutimin, 2024). Digital comics have been demonstrated to increase students' self-efficacy, or confidence in the ability to read, in addition to develop confidence in their reading literacy (Putri & Sukasih, 2025). Utami et al. (2025) the results from developing digital comic-based media even demonstrate great validity and appropriateness, with significant N-Gain successes in appropriate for reading comprehension skills. Additionally, compared to traditional media, the adoption of digital comic strips foster fourth-grade students reading comprehension, according to field research conducted in Singaraja. Digital comic greatly enhance understanding of narrative texts. Therefore, digital comic are not only an entertaining and innovative media, but they additionally effectively help students in elementary schools gain good learning characteristics and increase their reading literacy.

According to research by Sastrawan et al. (2021) digital comic media in audio visual format received high quality scores from media and material experts and was considered appropriate for use in elementary school students. The study also showed that digital comics might support students' motivation and produce more interesting and significant educational activities for elementary school students (Ananda et al., 2024). Study discovered that using digital comic media to support

elementary school and students' early reading abilities was both practical and successful. The results showed that digital comics are attractive, easy to access, and able to enhance students' reading comprehension by incorporating simple dialogue and visual elements.

To develop digital comic as an interactive medium, it is important for the researcher to identify what students' needs in learning. Some of the students' needs according to Belda-Medina. (2024) are their need to understand text, expand vocabulary, and develop reading skills. Students also definitely need interactive and fun media to maintain their attention to learning, thereby supporting students' motivation in learning. Kaptevskaia et al. (2025) also argues that the use of digital comic with attractive visuals can help address these students' needs. Students also need learning media that introduce social values such as equality, empathy and tolerance. Using digital comics that will raise social themes can help students to understand and appreciate diversity and global issues such as SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The need to address elementary school students' poor comprehension of literature and lack of social awareness highlights the importance of this study. According to preliminary interviews, there is a gap in the integration of social values into early education, since most students show limited awareness of SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This research aimed to introduce the values of SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and promote students' awareness of social responsibility, empathy, and justice through digital comic media. Students can engage with real-world issues in a relatable and active approach by using story-based digital comic,

which make complex social themes understandable, age-appropriate, and contextually meaningful.

Digital comic was selected as the proposed learning media because they combine visual components, simple language, and contextual storylines that are appropriate for elementary school level student characteristics. Furthermore, the developed digital comic is not intended to be used only on personal devices. The media offered through teacher-guided reading activity, or classroom projection. As a consequence, digital comic can still be used in elementary school classrooms where children rarely use gadgets.

1.2 Problem Identification

In reading, students face problems due to various factors, which can stem either from within themselves or from their surroundings. Internal factors are often linked to their attempts to fulfil developmental tasks and satisfy personal needs. Meanwhile, external factors arise from situation and conditions in their home, school, or broader socio-cultural environment that are not supportive. Sarilah & Endriani (2023) in their research found that students' reading difficulties are the most dominant problem that occurs in the school. They found difficulties include, difficulty being able to connect basic words into sentences, wrong spelling activities and pronouncing letters, always wrong in pronunciation of basic words, difficulty spelling and combining first and last syllables, spelling slowly and disjointedly and sometimes incorrectly. Given this situation, guidance from both teachers and parents plays a crucial role in helping students address the

challenges they face, particularly in relation to their reading difficulties and the level of complexity they encounter.

Most of the students did not understand the word. They had difficulties comprehending the text. The student's difficulty to comprehend vocabulary was the main cause of their reading comprehension issues. The other difficulties that the researchers found by the classroom observation and teacher interview is students were unable to comprehend the reading text because of students lack of vocabulary memorization. Unable to understand the technique in reading comprehension also becomes a difficulty of students to find the main idea. Last is lack of facilities, The facilities that were found to be lacking include the library and the laboratory. The library, in particular, has a limited collection of books and is rarely used, as it is seldom open. English reading materials and dictionaries are among the least available resources.

Similar challenges were identified at SDN 1 Tukadmungga, which serves as the research site for this study. Based on an interview with a sixth-grade homeroom teacher and classroom observation, the primary issue encountered in English language instruction is that English learning activities still relied on textbooks, worksheets, and limited online material as the primary learning resources. English instruction at the school tends to emphasize speaking skills, while reading comprehension receives less attention. Consequently, many sixth-grade students continued to experience difficulties in understanding written texts. Several contributing factors have been identified, including limited vocabulary knowledge, low student interest in the subject only 10 out of 27 students reported

enjoying English and insufficient instructional time. English is allocated only two lesson periods per week, which is inadequate for achieving meaningful progress in language learning.

Further insights were gained from interviews with two students, who expressed a liking for English. They reported that one of their main challenges is the inability to retain vocabulary, which often results in hesitation or silence when asked to read aloud in class. Additionally, the absence of clearly defined learning objectives in English lessons has been noted. Instruction tends to focus primarily on speaking and writing activities, with minimal emphasis on reading comprehension. This lack of instructional balance contributes to students' limited ability to comprehend texts effectively.

Another challenge identified is the absence of digital media integration in the English learning process. During interviews with two students, they expressed greater enthusiasm for reading when interactive and colorful media are used. They also mentioned that they often read digital comic at home; however, these are typically for entertainment purposes rather than educational content. When asked about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, the students appeared unfamiliar with the term and admitted they had never encountered it before. This highlights an opportunity for the researcher to utilize digital comic as a media to introduce and promote the value of SDG 10 among sixth-grade students at SDN 1 Tukadmungga. Given the students' positive response and interest in digital comic, this approach holds promise for

both enhancing reading engagement and fostering awareness of important global values.

This strategy has the potential to supported reader engagement and increase awareness of significant global values given the students' positive reaction and interest in digital comic. Considering students' interest in visual and interactive reading materials, digital comic is considered a suitable learning media to support reading comprehension activities

1.3 Limitation of Problem

This research is limited to exploring the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Tukadmungga, particularly those related to limited learning facilities, limited access to digital learning media, vocabulary difficulties, and students' dependence on teacher assistance and translation when comprehending English text. This study focusses specifically on reading comprehension and does not address other language skills, such as speaking, listening, or writing. The scope of the developed media is limited to a digital comic entitle Everyone Has a Dream, which integrates a specific sub-theme of SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), namely equality and equal opportunity regardless of gender, emphasizing that boys and girls have equal opportunities to pursue their dreams and future aspirations. Therefore, this study does not cover all targets or dimensions of SDG 10. Furthermore, although the developed digital comic was introduced to students to obtain their responses, this study did not include an implementation stage or examine the effectiveness of the

digital comic in improving students' reading comprehension through experimental testing, pre-tests, or post-tests.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the elaboration from the study background above the research question for this research are:

1. What are the needs of students in reading media to support their reading comprehension and awareness on Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)?
2. How is the development of digital comic as a reading media that supports reading comprehension activities and promotes awareness on Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)?
3. How is the quality of the developed digital comic for teaching reading comprehension and promoting SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) values for elementary school students based on expert judgment?
4. How do students' and teachers' respond to the use of the developed digital comic as a reading media for supporting reading comprehension activities and promoting awareness on the value of Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)?

1.5 Research Objectives

Here are the objectives of the study in which the writer would develop.

1. To identify students' needs regarding reading media that support their reading comprehension activities and increase their awareness of the value of Reduce Inequalities.
2. To develop a digital comic as a reading media designed to support students' reading comprehension and promote awareness of

Reduced Inequalities.

3. To evaluate the quality of the developed digital comic for teaching reading comprehension and promoting SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) values for elementary school students based on expert judgment
4. To explore students' and teachers' responses toward the use of the developed digital comic.

1.6 Significance of The Research

This study provides two expected research significances, which are:

1.6.1. Theoretical Significance

This study makes significant contributions to the development of knowledge in the field of English language education, specifically in the teaching of reading comprehension to students in elementary schools. This study strengthens the concept of multimodal learning through using digital comic as a learning medium. It emphasizes the importance of delivering material through many sensory channels, such as text, images, and visual features, to support students' understanding. Moreover, this study relates to the issue of digital literacy for young learners, as the ability to comprehend information from digital media has become an important part of 21st-century comprehension skills. Furthermore, implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into reading materials, specifically SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, provides an important theoretical contribution to values education. It demonstrates that learning materials may be applied not only to facilitate language abilities, but also to teach social and moral values using contextual and engaging strategies.

1.6.2. Practical Significance

1. For Teacher

This study provides real learning medium which is Digital Comic was implemented directly in the classroom. The teacher can use the digital comic as alternative to monotonous textbook materials, and the school also can adopt this type of learning medium to support students' involvement and interest in reading.

2. For Students Elementary School

Digital comic is design to support students' reading comprehension skills in an enjoyable and accessible way. Through interested visual and contextual, the digital comic is expected to encourage students' motivation in the form of a technology-based learning medium.

3. For Other Study

This research provides the references to other researcher who wants to analyze reading comprehension among elementary school in subject EFL. It encourages the development of learning material that integrates literacy skills with social values, such as equality and inclusiveness. This can inspire further innovation in culturally relevant and value based digital educational media.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1.7.1. Conceptual Definitions

a. Digital Comic

According to McCloud (1993) comic consist of pictures and other images arranged in a specific sequence to convey information and create an aesthetic response from the readers. Furthermore,

Augereau et al. (2018) explained that digital technology has changed the way comic is accessed and read, particularly through devices such as smartphones and tablets. A digital comic can be defined as a form of visual storytelling that combines images and text in sequence and can be accessed through digital devices to convey information or stories to readers.

b. Reading Comprehension

According to Snow (2002), reading comprehension is the process of understanding and constructing meaning through interaction with written language. This process involves three main elements: the reader, the text, and the reading activity. The reader uses prior knowledge, vocabulary, strategies, and motivation to understand the information presented in the text. therefore, reading comprehension can be defined as an active process in which readers understand and construct meaning from written texts by connecting the information in the text with their existing knowledge and reading purposes.

c. SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

According to the United Nations (2015), Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. This goal promotes the social, economic, and political inclusion of all people regardless of age, gender,

disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic status, or other status. Therefore, SDG 10 can be defined as a global goal that promotes equality, inclusion, and equal opportunities for all individuals without discrimination.

d. Young Learners

According to Scott & Ytreberg (1990), young learners have particular characteristics that distinguish them from adult learners. They may have short attention spans and do not always understand what the teacher explains, but they enjoy playing and learn best when they are having fun. Therefore, young learners can be defined as children who have unique learning characteristics and require enjoyable, engaging, and, age-appropriate learning activities to support their learning process.

1.7.2. Operational Definition

a. Digital Comic

In the study, the digital comic refers to a digital reading medium entitled “Everyone Has a Dream”, developed specifically for sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Tukadmungga. The digital comic combines simple English dialogues, colorful illustrations, characters, and sequential panels to support students’ reading comprehension. It also integrates SDG 10 (Reading Inequalities) values, particularly equality and equal opportunities regardless of gender, by emphasizing that everyone has the same opportunity to

pursue their dreams. The digital comic was developed using IbisPaint for illustrations and Canva for finalization and was presented in PDF format

b. Reading Comprehension

In this study, reading comprehension refers to the process of understanding the meaning and information presented in the simple English texts through the developed digital comic. It focuses on students' ability to understand the main idea, identify specific information, understand vocabulary in context, and interpret the content of the story. The digital comic is designed to support students' reading comprehension through simple dialogues, visual illustrations, and contextual content. However, this study does not measure the improvement of students' reading comprehension through pre-test or post-tests.

c. SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

In this study, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) refers specifically to the values of equality and equal opportunities regardless of gender integrated into the storyline of the developed digital comic. These values are represented through the story "Everyone Has a Dream", which emphasizes that boys and girls have equal opportunities to pursue their dreams and future aspirations without discrimination based on gender. The study focuses only on

this specific aspect of SDG 10 and does not cover all targets or dimension or Reduced Inequalities.

d. Young Learners

In this study, young learners refer specifically to the 27 sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Tukadmungga who were involved in the evaluation of the developed digital comic. They were the target users of the digital comic entitles “Everyone Has a Dream”, which was developed according to their learning needs and characteristics. The students were involved in providing responses to the developed digital comic through a questionnaire during the evaluation stage of the study.

