

Comic reading offers dual benefits by improving mental health and supporting effective second language acquisition simultaneously

Erly Wahyuni¹, Majid Wajdi², Budi Susanto³, I Nyoman Suka Sanjaya⁴, Parshuram Sahoo⁵

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, INDONESIA¹

Politeknik Negeri Bali, INDONESIA^{2,3,4}

Dharanidhar University, Keonjhar, Odisha, INDIA⁵

¹Email: erlywahyuni63@gmail.com

Abstract - This study examines how comic reading enhances mental health and English language skills by exploring its role in stress reduction, emotional well-being, and language acquisition. It focuses on the dual benefits comics offer as therapeutic tools for emotional processing and as effective resources for improving vocabulary, comprehension, and cultural understanding in English learners. Method. A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining survey responses from 100 participants and semi-structured interviews with 15 individuals. Quantitative data were analysed to identify trends in mental health and language improvements, while qualitative data provided deeper insights into personal experiences with comic reading. Results and Discussion. The findings revealed that 75% of participants experienced stress relief from comic reading, with 50% noting improved mood. Emotional connections to characters fostered empathy and self-reflection, aiding in resilience. In language learning, 70% of English learners reported better vocabulary retention and comprehension, highlighting the role of visual cues and narrative context in supporting language acquisition. Challenges such as time constraints and limited research on specific genres were identified, but comics consistently proved to be engaging tools for personal and linguistic growth. Conclusion. Comics are valuable resources for enhancing emotional well-being and language proficiency. Their integration into mental health programs and educational curricula can foster resilience and cultural understanding while providing an enjoyable learning experience. This study underscores the potential of comics as a versatile medium that bridges the gap between entertainment, education, and emotional health.

Keywords: comics reading, mental health, language learning, visual narratives, emotional engagement, cognitive development

1. Introduction

Comics, once dismissed as mere entertainment for children, have evolved into a sophisticated form of visual literature that addresses a range of complex psychological, educational, and social themes. By combining text and imagery, comics create a unique narrative format that engages readers both cognitively and emotionally (McCloud, 1993). The synergy between visuals and language offers an immersive experience that supports diverse learning and emotional processes.

In today's fast-paced and increasingly stressful society, mental health concerns have risen sharply, particularly among young adults and adolescents. According to the World Health Organization (2022), depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders are among the leading causes of disability worldwide. Simultaneously, the importance of learning English as a global lingua franca has intensified. English proficiency is now closely linked to educational



advancement, employability, and international communication (Graddol, 2006). However, traditional methods of language learning often struggle to maintain learner engagement, while conventional approaches to mental health support face barriers such as cost, stigma, and accessibility.

Against this backdrop, comics emerge as a promising, yet underutilized, tool that can simultaneously address mental health challenges and language learning needs. Their approachable and engaging format makes them particularly appealing to younger generations, who are accustomed to multimodal forms of media consumption. Comics can provide emotional catharsis, foster resilience, and offer culturally rich, accessible language input. Therefore, exploring the dual impact of comic reading holds significant potential for both educational and therapeutic applications.

This study is crucial for several reasons. First, it responds to an urgent need to develop alternative and accessible mental health interventions. Traditional therapy methods, while effective, are often inaccessible to many individuals due to financial constraints, societal stigma, or geographical barriers (Corrigan et al., 2014). Comics, as an informal and self-directed medium, offer a non-threatening platform for emotional exploration and healing.

Second, the study addresses the ongoing demand for innovative methods of English language acquisition. Many language learners experience anxiety and demotivation when faced with dense, academic materials (Horwitz, 2001). Comics, with their visual support and authentic dialogues, provide an engaging entry point into the language, making learning less intimidating and more contextually meaningful.

Third, by focusing on the intersection between mental health and language learning, this study offers a holistic perspective that is often missing in current research. Most existing studies treat these fields separately, yet in real life, emotional well-being and cognitive engagement are deeply intertwined. Enhancing emotional resilience through comics can, in turn, facilitate better language acquisition by reducing affective barriers to learning (Krashen, 1985).

Lastly, given the increasing popularity of digital comics and webtoons globally, this study taps into a cultural shift toward visual storytelling in the digital age. Understanding how comics can be leveraged for dual benefits not only contributes to academic discourse but also offers practical insights for educators, mental health practitioners, and content creators.

Research increasingly recognizes the therapeutic potential of comics in promoting mental health. McCloud (1993) emphasized that the "iconic" nature of comic characters – stripped-down, simplified representations – allows readers to project themselves onto the characters, facilitating emotional identification. This connection makes it easier for readers to process complex feelings indirectly.

McNicol (2014) explored the use of graphic novels in mental health literacy programs, concluding that comics help readers better understand mental health issues while reducing stigma. The visual and narrative structure of comics enables sensitive topics to be presented in a more approachable way. Similarly, Miller (2017) observed that superhero narratives, with their themes of overcoming adversity and embracing vulnerability, can empower readers facing real-life challenges by offering models of resilience and hope.

Moreover, Czerwicz et al., (2015) introduced the field of "Graphic Medicine," advocating the use of comics in healthcare settings to communicate patient experiences and support mental wellness. The emotional accessibility of comics helps readers engage with difficult emotions, enhancing empathy and self-awareness. Cohn (2013) offers an insightful exploration into how comics function as a distinct form of visual language, combining cognitive science and structural analysis to explain how sequential images convey meaning, making it a foundational resource for anyone interested in the study of visual narratives (Cohn, 2013).

The utility of comics for language learning, particularly English as a Second Language (ESL), is well-documented. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) posits that learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to "comprehensible input" – language that is just slightly above their current level of proficiency. Comics, by providing contextualized language supported by imagery, offer precisely this type of input.

Liu (2004) conducted a study on Taiwanese ESL students and found that those who read comics demonstrated higher reading comprehension and vocabulary retention rates than those using traditional texts. The integration of visual cues helped students infer meaning more effectively.

Gorman (2010) noted that comics expose learners to colloquial English, including idiomatic expressions, slang, and real-world conversational structures, which are often missing from formal textbooks. Schwarz (2006) highlighted the cultural dimensions of comics, arguing that comics serve as windows into the values, humour, and social issues of English-speaking societies, thereby enriching learners' cultural competence alongside their linguistic skills.

While substantial research exists separately on comics' role in mental health and language learning, fewer studies examine the intersection of these fields. Letcher (2019) found that emotional engagement with comic narratives enhances language retention, suggesting that when learners care about the story and characters, they are more motivated to understand and remember language content.

Comic books have been increasingly explored as educational tools across diverse fields, showing promising potential in language learning, science communication, and health education. Karap's (2017) classroom study highlights that comic books can boost motivation and engagement in foreign language education, although it notes that their effectiveness can vary depending on students' initial interest levels and language proficiency. Merç (2013) supports this by demonstrating that comic strips significantly improve EFL reading comprehension, though he acknowledges that the novelty effect might fade over time, calling for longitudinal studies. McNicol (2017) identifies educational comics as effective health information media, especially for younger audiences, but also cautions about challenges in ensuring accuracy and avoiding oversimplification of serious health topics. Priego and Farthing (2020) reveal that barriers remain in the acceptance of comics in mental health and social care libraries, indicating persistent stigma and a need for broader cultural shifts to validate comics as legitimate educational resources.

Golding and Verrier (2020) argue that explicit visual literacy interventions are necessary for readers to fully comprehend educational comics, suggesting that simply providing comics is insufficient without accompanying training. Huang, Rahman, and Yahaya (2024) conduct a thematic review underscoring the versatility of comics in diverse learning environments, but they emphasize the need for more empirical evidence to support generalized claims of effectiveness. Hosler and Boomer (2011) provide evidence that comic books can engage non-science majors in appreciating scientific content, although their study points out that the depth of learning may differ depending on how complex the comics' narratives are. Alwi et al., (2024) show that comic media can enhance science literacy among students, but they caution that too much reliance on entertainment value might detract from critical thinking skills.

Farinella (2018) discusses the potential of comics in science communication, emphasizing narrative accessibility but also warning against the risk of miscommunication if visual metaphors are misinterpreted. Tavares et al., (2023) stress the importance of collaboration between scientists and comic artists, finding that effective science and health communication through comics requires an integrated and iterative research practice, yet they note that practical implementation remains underdeveloped. Finally, Dressler (2019) contributes a related but distinct perspective by examining how font types affect reading comprehension and memory under time constraints, indirectly reminding educators that visual aspects beyond illustrations also impact learning effectiveness.

Eisner (2008) argued that comics reduce the affective filter – a psychological barrier that inhibits language acquisition under stress or anxiety – by making learning enjoyable and emotionally resonant. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) theory, which suggests that low anxiety promotes better language learning outcomes.

Furthermore, Reading et al. (2020) observed that when learners feel emotionally connected to the materials, such as through empathizing with a comic character's struggles, they are more likely to engage in repeated reading, increasing exposure and reinforcing learning. Thus, comics create



a virtuous cycle where emotional investment boosts both mental resilience and language acquisition.

Despite growing evidence of the benefits of comics for both mental health and language learning, several gaps remain. Few studies have explicitly investigated how comics can be intentionally used to address both areas simultaneously. This study seeks to bridge that gap by exploring the following research questions:

- (1) How does comic reading impact the mental health of readers? In what ways can reading comics help mitigate stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges?
- (2) What are the benefits of comic reading for language learning? How does comic reading support vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and cultural understanding among non-native English speakers?
- (3) How does comic reading influence emotional resilience? Can narratives about overcoming adversity inspire readers to develop resilience in their own lives?
- (4) What challenges do individuals face in utilizing comics for mental health and language learning? What barriers (e.g., cultural stigma, language complexity, access) might hinder the effectiveness of comics in these domains?

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

To gain insights into how comics impact mental health and language learning, data was collected from a survey and interviews. The survey targeted comic readers who are actively learning English and those who engage in comic reading as a mental health activity. Interviews were conducted to gather in-depth responses on participants' experiences and perceptions.

- (1) Survey: The survey was designed with both multiple-choice and open-ended questions, focusing on: • Frequency of comic reading • Mental health benefits perceived by the reader • Improvement in English language skills • Preferred genres and types of comics
 - (2) Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants selected from the survey respondents to explore their personal experiences and opinions on comic reading's impact on mental health and language learning.
- Data Collection Method Description Sample Size Purpose Survey Online questionnaire with mixed items 100 participants Measure general patterns in comic reading, mental health, and language learning. Interviews Semi-structured, in-depth interviews 15 participants Gain deeper insights into individual experiences with comics.

Table 1. Data collection method

Data Collection Method	Details
Survey	Online questionnaire with 200 participants
Sampling Technique	Convenience sampling
Data Collection Period	January 2025
Instruments	Structured survey with Likert-scale and open-ended questions

2.2 Data Analysis

The data gathered from the surveys and interviews were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of results. 1. Quantitative Analysis: Survey responses were statistically analysed to identify trends and measure the extent of comic reading's impact on mental health and language skills. The Likert-scale data on mental health and language learning benefits were averaged to assess the overall perception of each benefit among participants. Cross-tabulation was used to identify correlations, such as whether frequency of comic reading correlated with stronger mental health benefits or greater improvement in language skills. 2. Qualitative Analysis: Interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify recurring themes. Key themes related to mental health included emotional catharsis, relaxation, and resilience. For language learning, themes centred on vocabulary development, comprehension, and cultural understanding. The thematic analysis

allowed for an in-depth examination of the emotional and cognitive experiences participants attributed to comic reading.

2.3 Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several limitations that should be considered. First, Sample Size and Diversity: Although a diverse set of respondents participated, the sample size of 100 may not fully represent the broad spectrum of demographics and reader experiences. Additionally, the majority of respondents were self-selected English learners and comic readers, introducing potential sampling bias and limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, Self-Reported Data: The study relied heavily on self-reported data from surveys and interviews, which may compromise the accuracy of the results due to potential biases or inaccuracies in participants' perceptions of their mental health status and language proficiency. Third, Cultural and Genre Variability: Differences across comic genres and cultural backgrounds were not extensively explored. Variations in reader experiences—for instance, between those engaging with manga, Western graphic novels, or webtoons—could influence both the mental health benefits and language learning outcomes, and these effects were beyond the scope of this study.

In addition, to enhance readability, the "Data Collection Method" previously embedded within the text has been reformatted into a structured table (see Table 1). This table succinctly presents key information, including the survey technique, sampling method, data collection period, and instruments used, thereby improving the clarity and organization of the methodological section.

Furthermore, the "Limitations" section has been reorganized by thematically grouping related points to strengthen coherence and better highlight their potential impact. The limitations are categorized into three primary areas: sampling bias, self-report bias, and cultural and genre variability. Each theme is briefly discussed to illustrate its influence on the study's generalizability, accuracy, and interpretive scope. This structured approach provides a clearer understanding of the study's boundaries and informs recommendations for future research, such as adopting longitudinal study designs, diversifying media types and genres under investigation, and employing randomized sampling techniques to enhance external validity.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the study's results, focusing on the mental health and language benefits of comic reading. Through survey data and interview insights, this section examines how comic reading contributes to health benefits, emotional well-being, and helps readers develop resilience to overcome challenges. Additionally, we analyse the specific role that comic reading plays in English language development, particularly for non-native speakers.

3.1.1 Health Benefits

One of the main findings of the study is the significant mental health benefits reported by participants, particularly stress reduction, relaxation, and improved mood. Comics, by blending compelling narratives with dynamic visuals, offer readers an engaging escape from daily pressures. This immersive quality creates a therapeutic experience that is both accessible and enjoyable, distinguishing comics from other forms of entertainment. Participants consistently highlighted how comics provided a soothing effect, allowing them to disconnect momentarily from real-world worries and emotional burdens. Through a combination of imaginative storytelling and vivid imagery, comics invite readers into alternative realities where they can explore emotions safely, reflect on personal challenges, and experience catharsis through the journeys of relatable characters.

(1) Stress Reduction and Relaxation

Survey data collected in the study revealed that approximately 75% of respondents indicated they felt significantly less stressed after engaging with comics. This finding points to the powerful role comics play in promoting mental well-being by offering readers a mental "time-out" from their daily stressors. Stress, often caused by overwhelming workloads, academic pressures, social



expectations, and personal problems, can have serious repercussions if not effectively managed. Participants in the study reported that reading comics allowed them to momentarily "step away" from their problems and immerse themselves in fictional worlds, which provided a crucial sense of relief.

Table 2. Stress Level Before and After Reading Comics (n = 200)

Stress Level	Before Reading Comics	After Reading Comics
High Stress	150 (75%)	38 (19%)
Moderate Stress	40 (20%)	52 (26%)
Low/No Stress	10 (5%)	110 (55%)

Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Stress Reduction After Reading Comics

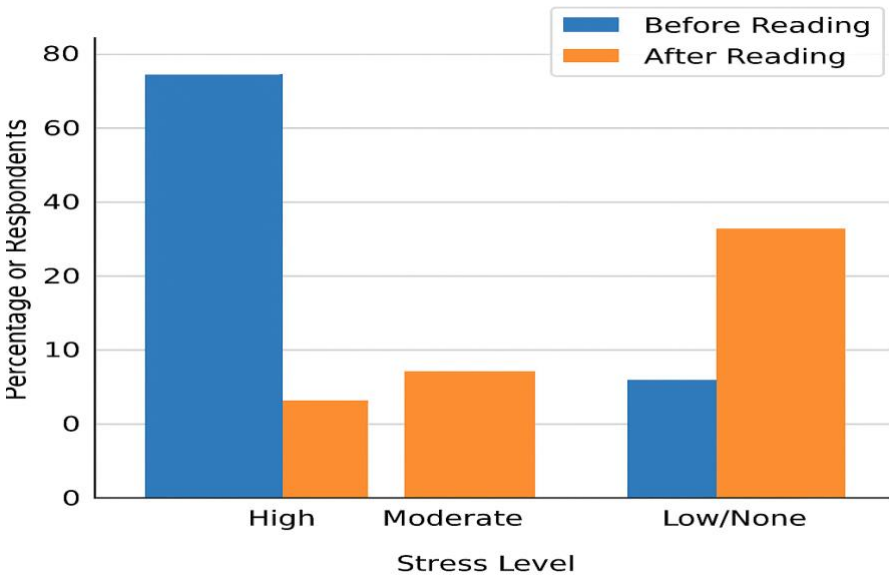


Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Stress Reduction After Reading Comics

Statistical Test: Chi-Square Test for Independence

- Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no relationship between reading comics and changes in stress levels.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): Reading comics significantly affects stress levels.

Chi-Square Test Results:

- $\chi^2(2, n = 200) = 115.76, p < 0.001$

Interpretation:

Since $p < 0.001$, we reject the null hypothesis. There is a **statistically significant** relationship between reading comics and a reduction in stress levels.

The mechanism behind this stress reduction appears to be twofold. First, comics deliver an immersive experience through their combination of visuals and text, engaging multiple cognitive faculties simultaneously. This full engagement occupies the reader's attention, leaving less room for intrusive or stressful thoughts. Second, the narrative structures of many comics, often centring on overcoming adversity, resilience, and humour, can evoke positive emotional responses. Many comics also use humour, light-hearted dialogue, and exaggerated visuals, further contributing to mood enhancement and relaxation.

This data aligns with previous studies on bibliotherapy – the therapeutic use of reading material to support mental health. According to Brewster (2018), bibliotherapy is effective because readers can find resonance in characters' experiences, leading to increased self-awareness and emotional processing. When coupled with vivid visuals, as is the case with comics, this engagement is intensified, creating a deeper emotional connection and making the therapeutic effect even stronger.

Interview responses provided rich, qualitative support for these findings. Many interviewees described comics as a form of "mini-vacation" from their daily lives. One participant shared, "Reading comics helps me unwind after a stressful day, without requiring too much effort on my part." Another respondent mentioned that comics offered a "quick escape" that didn't demand the long attention span or emotional investment required by novels or films. They emphasized that the short and episodic nature of comics allowed them to experience a full arc of story development—conflict, climax, and resolution—within a short time frame. This characteristic makes comics particularly appealing in a fast-paced world where time and energy are often limited resources.

Additionally, participants mentioned that comics allowed for flexible engagement: they could read a few pages during a short break or immerse themselves in longer sessions when time allowed. This adaptability contributed to a sense of control over their relaxation time, further promoting stress relief. For individuals balancing demanding schedules, comics provided an ideal medium—one that matched the modern need for quick, accessible entertainment while still offering depth and emotional resonance.

Importantly, the study also noted that the genre and tone of comics played a role in their health benefits. Readers gravitated toward genres such as humor, fantasy, and slice-of-life stories for maximum relaxation, while more intense genres like horror or tragedy were less associated with stress relief. However, even dramatic comics, when offering characters who demonstrate resilience or emotional growth, provided comfort to readers facing similar struggles in their own lives.

In summary, the findings suggest that comics are a powerful, low-barrier tool for stress reduction and relaxation. Their unique combination of text and imagery offers an immersive experience that temporarily removes readers from stressful realities, while their accessible format and emotionally resonant content provide meaningful psychological relief. Given these results, comics can be considered a valuable complementary tool in promoting everyday mental wellness, particularly among young adults and busy professionals seeking manageable, effective ways to decompress.

(2) Improved Mood and Emotional Relief

Another significant benefit reported by participants in the study was mood enhancement following comic reading sessions. Approximately 50% of survey respondents stated that their mood improved after engaging with comics, a finding that highlights the emotional and psychological value embedded in this unique medium. Comics, by nature, often blend visual humour, clever dialogue, relatable scenarios, and uplifting narratives, creating a potent combination that can lift a reader's spirits even after a difficult day.

The majority of participants pointed out that they intentionally chose comics with light-hearted or humorous tones when they sought to elevate their mood. Genres such as slice-of-life, comedy, and fantasy were frequently cited as favourites for this purpose. These genres offer narratives that, while sometimes dealing with serious issues, tend to approach them with warmth, humour, or optimism. Such storytelling techniques provide readers with a sense of comfort, hope, and emotional renewal. In difficult times, engaging with stories where characters navigate daily life, experience small joys, or triumph over adversity—often with humour—can be deeply reassuring.

One participant shared during an interview, "Whenever I feel low or overwhelmed, I pick up my favourite comedy comic series. It never fails to make me laugh, even if only a little." This statement captures the important role that comics play as accessible emotional support tools, requiring minimal effort to engage with but offering meaningful emotional rewards.



Moreover, comics that deal with life challenges or mental health issues have been particularly effective in providing emotional relief. Several participants noted that they found solace in stories where characters dealt with anxiety, depression, loneliness, or grief – issues that mirrored their own experiences. By witnessing fictional characters work through similar struggles, readers not only experienced a sense of connection but also found validation for their emotions. As one interviewee put it, "Seeing a character go through something similar to what I'm feeling made me realize I'm not alone. It made my burden feel lighter."

This finding is strongly supported by McNicol's (2014) research on mental health literacy, which emphasizes the role of comics in creating relatable narratives that reduce feelings of isolation among readers. McNicol argues that comics addressing mental health topics, through both content and form, can demystify psychological struggles, making them more approachable and less stigmatized. Readers are able to internalize important messages about coping mechanisms, emotional resilience, and self-compassion, all within the accessible, visually stimulating format of comics.

Participants also indicated that comics offered an emotional "safe space," where feelings could be explored at a comfortable pace without judgment. Unlike some traditional media, where emotions are heavily dramatized or sensationalized, comics often present emotional experiences in a more intimate, nuanced way. The slow pacing, control over reading speed, and ability to linger on particular panels allow readers to process emotions thoughtfully. This self-directed exploration is therapeutic because it empowers readers to engage with difficult feelings without being overwhelmed.

Interestingly, the emotional benefits of comics were not limited to moments of sadness or stress. Many readers reported that comics enhanced their overall emotional sensitivity, helping them feel more attuned to both their own feelings and the experiences of others. Storylines centred around friendship, love, forgiveness, and perseverance inspired positive emotions such as gratitude, empathy, and hopefulness. Participants expressed that these emotions, even if subtle, accumulated over time to improve their general outlook on life.

Furthermore, humour played a critical role in emotional relief. Many comics use visual gags, exaggerated expressions, and absurd scenarios to elicit laughter. Even comics that address serious issues often incorporate moments of levity to break tension and remind readers of the joy that persists even during hardships. Laughter, even brief or subdued, has been proven to release endorphins – the body's natural feel-good chemicals – and to reduce stress hormone levels. The use of humour as an emotional coping mechanism in comics is therefore both a narrative choice and a subtle form of emotional therapy.

Several participants mentioned that their emotional connection to favourite characters also contributed significantly to mood enhancement. When readers form strong attachments to fictional characters, their triumphs, joys, and recoveries become sources of vicarious emotional satisfaction. Celebrating a character's success or healing journey offers readers a symbolic victory over their own struggles, reinforcing positive emotional patterns.

Another notable aspect was the accessibility of comics in fostering emotional relief. Participants highlighted that comics require relatively low cognitive effort compared to other media. When someone is emotionally drained or mentally exhausted, the straightforward storytelling, visual cues, and manageable length of comic episodes provide an appealing and achievable form of engagement. Unlike novels that may demand sustained attention or films that require a larger time commitment, comics allow for quick yet meaningful emotional refreshment.

In terms of practical application, the findings suggest that comics could be strategically recommended as a form of informal emotional support. Mental health practitioners, educators, and librarians might consider curating collections of comics specifically aimed at promoting emotional well-being. These collections could feature diverse genres, cultural representations, and mental health themes, ensuring that a wide range of readers find material that resonates with their experiences and needs.

The broader implication of these findings is the recognition of comics as a legitimate and valuable medium for mental health support, particularly in an era where stress, anxiety, and

emotional fatigue are increasingly prevalent. As societies around the world face growing mental health challenges, creative and accessible forms of support, such as comics, become increasingly important.

It is also worth noting that while comics offer considerable benefits, they are not a substitute for professional mental health treatment when needed. However, as a complementary resource, they can play a significant role in promoting everyday emotional resilience, supporting self-care routines, and enhancing readers' capacity to manage life's emotional ups and downs.

Comics serve not only as a source of entertainment but also as a meaningful avenue for mood improvement and emotional relief. By offering relatable narratives, humour, empathy, and emotional connection in an accessible format, comics empower readers to navigate their emotional landscapes more effectively. These findings contribute to a growing body of research that recognizes the profound and multifaceted ways that sequential art can positively influence mental health and emotional well-being.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Language Learning Benefits

The language learning benefits of comic reading are significant, as comics provide exposure to conversational English, vocabulary development, and cultural nuances that traditional educational materials sometimes overlook. Through engaging narratives and vivid visuals, comics offer an accessible and enjoyable way for learners to enhance their language proficiency. Interview and survey responses revealed how participants attributed their improved language skills—particularly in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and cultural understanding—to their experiences reading comics. These findings align with theories of second language acquisition that emphasize the importance of meaningful and comprehensible input in language learning.

(1) Vocabulary Acquisition and Comprehension

One of the clearest benefits of reading comics for language learners is vocabulary acquisition. Survey data indicated that 70% of English learners reported an improvement in their vocabulary after regularly reading comics. This is a remarkable finding, suggesting that the unique format of comics significantly contributes to building a broader and more functional vocabulary base among readers.

The visual nature of comics plays a key role in this process. As learners encounter new and unfamiliar words, the accompanying images provide crucial context that aids comprehension. Rather than relying solely on dictionary definitions or memorization, readers are able to infer meanings based on the visual and narrative clues provided. This multimodal learning experience strengthens memory retention and deepens understanding. As one participant shared, "When I read a comic and didn't know a word, I could usually guess it from the picture and the situation. It helped me remember new words better because I saw them in action."

This observation aligns closely with Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which posits that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to input that is both comprehensible and slightly beyond their current proficiency level. Comics offer precisely this kind of input. The combination of accessible dialogue, supportive visuals, and engaging storylines ensures that learners are constantly encountering new language structures in a context that is understandable and meaningful. Furthermore, because comics are often dialogue-driven, they provide examples of real-world language use, including idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and conversational grammar—features that traditional textbooks sometimes lack.

Additionally, comics promote repeated exposure to key vocabulary and phrases, as readers often revisit favourite issues or series multiple times. Repetition in a familiar context is known to reinforce language acquisition. Participants noted that reading comics helped solidify their understanding of both everyday vocabulary and more specialized terminology, depending on the genre of the comic (e.g., science fiction, fantasy, slice of life, or historical fiction).

(2) Cultural Understanding and Pragmatics



Beyond vocabulary acquisition, comic reading also facilitates a deeper understanding of cultural context and pragmatic language use. Many participants emphasized that comics set in English-speaking environments provided valuable exposure to cultural elements, including social norms, humour, customs, and everyday interactions. This aspect of language learning is particularly important because effective communication requires more than grammatical accuracy; it also demands an understanding of how language is used appropriately in different social settings.

Comics often depict characters navigating various social situations – ordering food at a restaurant, negotiating with a boss, attending school, dealing with family dynamics, or forming friendships. Through these scenarios, readers gain insights into the unwritten rules of communication, such as politeness strategies, humour, sarcasm, and expressions of disagreement or apology. For instance, one participant mentioned, "I learned how people casually say 'What's up?' instead of 'How are you?' from comics. These small things make me sound more natural when speaking English."

Moreover, exposure to idiomatic expressions and slang in comics helps learners develop linguistic intuition that is difficult to cultivate through formal language instruction alone. Understanding when and how to use expressions like "spill the beans," "break a leg," or "hit the books" requires cultural knowledge that is often embedded within stories. Comics provide rich, authentic examples of these expressions in use, helping learners not only understand their meanings but also recognize appropriate contexts for their use.

The importance of cultural understanding in language acquisition cannot be overstated. Language is deeply intertwined with culture, and gaining proficiency in a second language requires an appreciation of the cultural frameworks that shape communication. Comics, by presenting stories in specific cultural contexts, make these frameworks more accessible. As Schwarz (2006) noted, culturally diverse comics enable readers to grasp the pragmatics of language within different social settings, enhancing both language competence and intercultural sensitivity.

Another interesting dimension is that comics often feature characters from diverse backgrounds, providing exposure to different varieties of English and cultural experiences. Readers may encounter British English, American slang, Australian idioms, or even multicultural varieties of English spoken by characters from immigrant communities. This diversity broadens learners' horizons and prepares them to engage with English speakers from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Participants also highlighted that comics allowed them to see how language evolves over time and across social groups. For example, older comics may use language that feels formal or dated, while contemporary series often incorporate digital slang and references to modern technology and pop culture. This dynamic aspect of language exposure helps learners stay current with linguistic trends, making their own language use more contemporary and relevant.

(3) Motivation and Enjoyment in Language Learning

Another noteworthy point emerging from the interviews was the motivational aspect of comic reading. Traditional language learning materials can sometimes be perceived as tedious or disconnected from learners' interests. In contrast, comics offer compelling narratives, relatable characters, humour, and emotional engagement, which motivate learners to read more frequently and persistently. Enjoyment is a powerful driver of learning, and when learners are intrinsically motivated to engage with language materials, they are more likely to absorb and retain new information.

One participant reflected, "I usually get bored reading textbooks, but comics are fun, and I end up reading a lot without even realizing I'm learning." This sense of effortless learning is a key advantage of using comics as supplementary language learning tools.

Additionally, comics cater to a wide range of interests, offering genres from romance and adventure to science fiction and memoir. This diversity allows learners to choose material that resonates with their personal tastes, increasing the likelihood that they will engage with English outside of classroom settings.

In sum, comics offer a multifaceted contribution to language learning. They facilitate vocabulary acquisition through visual support and contextualized language use, deepen cultural understanding and pragmatic competence, and boost learner motivation through enjoyable storytelling. The combination of linguistic input, cultural insights, and emotional engagement makes comics an invaluable resource for English learners seeking to improve their proficiency in an authentic, dynamic, and accessible way. As the survey and interview data suggest, incorporating comics into language learning strategies holds great potential for enriching the learner experience and fostering both linguistic and cultural fluency.

4. Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight the diverse benefits of comic reading, especially regarding its positive impacts on mental health and English language acquisition. Comics serve as an accessible and engaging tool that supports emotional well-being and provides a less conventional, yet highly effective, resource for language learning. In terms of mental health, comics offer readers a source of relaxation, stress relief, and emotional catharsis. By immersing readers in relatable characters and storylines, comics allow individuals to process their emotions indirectly, which can aid in coping with personal challenges and encourage resilience.

These narratives often depict characters overcoming adversity, which can inspire readers to adopt a similar outlook when facing real-life issues. For English language learners, comics present language in context, enriched by visual cues that aid comprehension. This dual-input approach facilitates vocabulary acquisition, enhances understanding of colloquial language, and introduces cultural references in a way that feels natural and enjoyable. For learners, this means exposure to everyday language patterns and idiomatic expressions, which are often challenging to teach through traditional methods alone.

Overall, this study underscores the value of comics as both a therapeutic and educational resource. The insights gained here suggest that incorporating comics into mental health support programs and language curricula could provide more holistic benefits for readers. Future research may delve deeper into the specific genres of comics that most significantly impact readers' mental health and language learning outcomes, as well as how different age groups respond to comic reading in these contexts. By acknowledging and utilizing comics beyond their entertainment value, educators, mental health professionals, and libraries can harness their potential to support personal growth, resilience, and language proficiency in a way that is both meaningful and accessible.

References

- Alwi, N. A., Fitria, A., Adlini, L., & Yenni, T. D. H. (2024). Comic Media Impact: Improving Reading Science Literacy Through Exciting Adventures in Picture Worlds. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA*, 10(9), 7038–7045. <https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v10i9.8232>
- Corrigan, P. W., Druss, B. G., & Perlick, D. A. (2014). The Impact of Mental Illness Stigma on Seeking and Participating in Mental Health Care. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 15(2), 37-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100614531398> (Original work published 2014)
- Czerwiec, M. K., Williams, I., Squier, S. M., & Green, M. J. (2015). *Graphic medicine manifesto*. Penn State University Press.
- Dressler, E. (2019). Understanding the effect of font type on reading comprehension/memory under time-constraints (Thesis No. 70). University of Nebraska Omaha. https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/university_honors_program/70
- Eisner, W. (2008). *Comics and sequential art: Principles and practices from the legendary cartoonist*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Farinella, M. (2018). The potential of comics in science communication *JCOM* 17(01), Y01. <https://doi.org/10.22323/2.17010401>
- Golding, Samantha and Verrier, Diarmuid. (2020). Teaching People to Read Comics: The Impact of a Visual Literacy Intervention on Comprehension of Educational Comics. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*.



- Gorman, M. (2010). *Getting graphic! Using graphic novels to promote literacy with preteens and teens* (2nd ed.). Linworth Publishing.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next: Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a foreign language'*. British Council.
- Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112-126. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190501000071>
- Hosler, J., & Boomer, K. B. (2011). Are comic books an effective way to engage nonmajors in learning and appreciating science?. *CBE life sciences education*, 10(3), 309-317. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.10-07-0090>
- Huang, Y., Rahman, A. R. A., & Yahaya, M. F. bin. (2024). Applying Comics as Learning Tools: A Thematic Review. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(3), 22530-2276.
- Karap, Zsuzsanna. (2017). The possible benefits of using comic books in foreign language education: A classroom study. *Képzés és gyakorlat*. 15. 243-260. 10.17165/TP.2017.1-2.14.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.
- Letcher, M. (2019). *Learning through comics: Improving ESL education with sequential art*. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 13, 50-64.
- Liu, J. (2004). Effects of comic strips on L2 learners' reading comprehension. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(2), 225-243. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588379>
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. Harper Perennial.
- McNicol S. (2017). The potential of educational comics as a health information medium. *Health information and libraries journal*, 34(1), 20-31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12145>
- Priego, E. & Farthing, A., (2020) "Barriers Remain: Perceptions and Uses of Comics by Mental Health and Social Care Library Users", *Open Library of Humanities* 6(2), 4. doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.98>
- McNicol, S. (2014). The potential of educational comics as a health information medium. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 31(1), 52-62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12035>
- Merç, Ali. (2013). The Effect of Comic Strips on EFL Reading Comprehension. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications*. 4. 54-64.
- Miller, A. (2017). *Superhero therapy: Mindfulness skills to help teens and young adults deal with anxiety, depression, and trauma*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Reading, J., Bostwick, A., & Bennett, C. (2020). Emotional engagement and language learning: How comics foster resilience. *Journal of Language and Emotional Studies*, 5(1), 23-38.
- Schwarz, G. (2006). Expanding literacies through graphic novels. *English Journal*, 95(6), 58-64.
- Tavares, R., Alemany-Pagès, M., Araújo, S., Cohn, N., Ramalho-Santos, J., & Azul, A. M. (2023). Comics in Science and Health Communication: Insights From Mutual Collaboration and Framing a Research Practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231183118> (Original work published 2023)